UP HILL DOWN DALE

Eden Phillpotts

Delightful studies of Devonshire by the author of "The Farmer's Wife."

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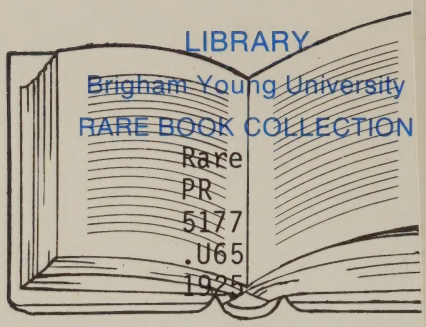
By
EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of
"Redcliff," "The Three Brothers," etc.

Eden Phillpotts is already well known as a short-story writer. He weaves his plots with great ingenuity and a true vein of humour around Devonshire characters. In this volume he has collected some of his best stories. They will appeal to all interested in the short story and to all lovers of fiction.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UP HILL, DOWN DALE

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A VOLUME OF SHORT STORIES :: By

***EDEN PHILLPOTTS* :: ::**

Author of "Redcliff," "The Three Brothers," etc.

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UPB

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AMY UP A TREE

Up Hill, Down Dale

AMY UP A TREE

SOME women seem to be born for nought but to bring misery to the men, and they take their pleasure by tormenting the lord of creation. Yet many of these women seem to be made to love, and they be generally the prettiest. Us go down afore 'em like reeds, and, too often, never spring up again, when the creatures have played out their games and gone on their way to find more sport.

To see Amy Bassett with a young man was to see a cat with a mouse; and such was her skill at nineteen, that she'd keep two, or even three, in torture at one time; which no cat can. She made a proper business of flirting —even at twelve she'd order the boys to give her lollipops for kissing her finger! She was tokened a score of times, and broke it off for new adventures; and then, in sight of twenty, when she was a properly lovely piece, as beautiful and as hard as the glass Virgin Mary in the church window, she had three strings to her bow, and her poor, widowed mother hoped to God she'd wed and away inside the year.

Grey-eyed and fair and trim was Amy, and nothing sly about her laugh, or her frank love of pleasure. She adored company and pretty clothes, and only the men knew what maddening qualities she'd got hid in her; or how she thawed one day and froze the next; or how she'd kiss under the moon one night, and look through you next morning, as if she'd never seen you afore and never wanted to again.

In fact a tartar; and when Geoffrey Staines and Reuben Halfyard were known to be on the war-path, a good few other young men laughed and wondered how long their

savings would hold out, and which would get left first. Then Ernest Bloom, from America, came back to have a look at his old home and find a Devonshire wife ; and though he heard all about her from his aunt, Mercy Bloom, who prayed him almost on her knees he wouldn't turn his thoughts in that direction, yet such was the magic of the maid, that Bloom, from chaffing her a bit, soon got interested and promised to be another victim. For the shape of her mouth made men half silly, and the words that came out of it completed the job.

Of course Ernest Bloom wasn't a green youngster, to be took in by a pretty face and a few clever compliments. He must have been thirty-five when he came home for a holiday, with plenty of dollars in his pocket and a large experience of life gathered in Virginia, where he was foreman in a tobacco growing place. But Amy shone upon him like the light to Paul, and he didn't hesitate to confess he'd never seen such a pretty woman—in America, or anywhere else.

"To think," he said, "that Nat Bassett's daughter should have turned into such an amazing creation, from the slip of a dirty-nosed baby she was when I left England fifteen year ago!"

He said that to Amy's mother, whom he remembered, for her father was dead and his widow had the farm by the river just above Staverton Bridge, where the grazing ground slopes to the foot of the forest and the great orchard runs along the brink of the Dart.

And Mrs. Bassett lied to the returned native, and said her daughter was good as gold and only waiting to make the right man happy when he came along ; though well she knew 'twas a most unlikely thing that Amy would make any man happy.

Other people, of course, told Ernest different, and Joe Blades, who'd suffered in his turn, said that, so far as he could see, Amy did ought to be taken to a public place and stoned to death. Which showed what he'd been through.

However, the girl chose to be interested in Ernest, and told him she only cared for grown men and never could abide the boys, because they was so weak-minded. She

made him tell about his adventures in America, and listened with round, wondering eyes, as innocent as a kitten's. And she contrived, without anything said or done, to show Ernest she was much impressed by him, and felt very proud that he should take any notice of such a young woman as her.

Well, now she'd got three on her hands and was as happy as a queen, for up to the present she had been playing Geoffrey Staines against Reuben Halfyard, and making each think he was the favoured one ; but, with larger game in sight and a man almost worth marrying, Geoff and Reuben sank into shadows. She never loosed a man, however, till she'd got all her fun with him, and she had the art to keep 'em on the hooks until there wasn't a wriggle left. So now she planned another of her wicked pranks, doubting not that she'd have the last ounce from the younger men, before she turned her full attention to the older one.

Reuben was the only son of his mother, a very steadfast and high-minded young fellow as worked on the railway, but desired to do greater things. He'd offered to take Amy to Canada, because he could get a job on the Canadian Pacific Railway if he was minded, and it promised much higher prospects than his present task on the little loop-line from Totnes to Ashburton. He courted honest and square, weren't frightened of Amy's games in the past, believed her with all his heart, and felt sure he'd make her a good husband.

And to Geoffrey Staines she said the same. He was a farmer who had lately bought Aller Mead, a grazing farm up the river beyond Mrs. Bassett's. 'Twas his dream some day to have Mrs. Bassett's place and add it to Aller Mead, because they adjoined ; and Bank Side, as Mrs. Bassett's was called, would be Amy's in fulness of time, and go very nice inside a ring fence with Geoffrey's larger farm.

He, too, loved her in a straight and proper fashion. He was a flaxen man of stuggy build, with blue eyes and a nice head of curly hair ; while Reuben shaved clean and his eyes were brown, and his build a thought lighter but taller than Geoff's. They'd known each other from boyhood, and never differed except in the matter of Amy ; and even

over that they was above-board and fought fair and took no advantage of each other. But both was mad for her, and she, knowing it, wondered how she might get her pleasure out of 'em before she turned 'em going. She liked 'em, same as she liked everything in a pair of trousers, and would let Geoff take her to a revel, or go on the river with Reuben ; but to love either, as they thought she did, and as she declared she did, weren't in her nature ; though now she'd got 'em both in a hopeful frame of mind and knew they'd do her bidding if she lifted her finger.

And this is what she done. I believe the planning gave her as much pleasure as she thought of the fun she'd get out of the actual event ; for a plot was meat and drink to her.

It began when she met Geoffrey for a Sunday walk, and he had a crow to pluck with her, for she'd been giving Ernest Bloom a good bit of her company lately ; and Geoffrey, busy at the hay harvest, had not cared over much to see Amy on the river twice a day sometimes with the chap from Virginia.

He soon forgot that, however, in surprise at what the girl told him.

" I don't mind Reuben," said Geoffrey, " for I know very well you can't make up your mind betwixt me and him, though 'tis about time you did : but I draw the line at this here foreigner, Bloom, and I doubt if 'tis worthy of you to see him so oft."

The girl laughed at that.

" He won't let me alone," she answered, " and I'm fed up with all this galivanting. I have decided, but I'm feared of my life of Bloom, for he's death on me and won't take ' No.' And I'm feared of Reuben, too, because he's a fierce chap and growing terrible impatient. But I'll do this, Geoff, if you're man enough. I'll run off with you by night, and we'll get married and come back the next day. Then I shall be safe. But if you'm feared to do such a bold thing, you've only got to say so, and I'll turn elsewhere."

" You'll marry me ! " he shouted, scarce believing his own ears.

" I will, if you'll run away with me. I've thought it all out, and if you'll bring your boat one night to the landing in the orchard, you can row me where you list, so it's safe."

"There's no need of secrets," he said. "If you say you're going to wed me, then who on God's earth have the right to deny it?"

But she was for running away by night by the river, and since he felt a lot too excited at his luck to trouble about details, he agreed to them.

"I'll fly to the moon if you like," he said, "and if you want to flit by night, so it shall be. There's no need, but I'm only wishful to pleasure you. I'll row you down to the mill pool by the Abbey; then we'll get across to Totnes and catch a train where you please, and be married in due course and come home again."

"I'd love that," she declared. "I don't want all the bother of a wedding and telling mother and my friends."

So they talked out the details and presently Geoff liked the thought of just slipping off without any fuss, almost as well as Amy appeared to do. So they left it at that, and it was arranged that so soon as Staines had got in his hay, they'd fix the night for the adventure.

And two days later Amy went for a chat with Reuben in his dinner hour. He came out of the signal box, where he worked at the station, and took his basket and sat along with the girl in the burdocks by the river. And then she surprised him within an inch of his life.

"I've been thinking a lot about Canada," she said.

"I thought 'twas Virginia," he answered; and so, of course, she vowed Ernest Bloom was an old bore, and she'd grown weary of everybody to Staverton and wanted to be off and away.

"You know very well they be all dust compared to you, Reuben," she told him. "And the more I see of men, the surer I feel that you're the only one for me."

"I'm hearing things," answered Reuben. He sat agape with a bit of pasty half-way to his mouth.

"And you've got to hear more yet," she went on. "I'm frightened of Geoffrey Staines—such an obstinate chap as he is!—and I'm frightened of Mr. Bloom, too. I want, before everything in the world, to clear out—just you and me. I don't want no fuss and no hard words from Geoff. And I don't want bitter hours with my mother neither; but if you'll marry me on the quiet, I'll go to Canada with

you ; and some day, perhaps, if I don't sell it when mother dies, we'll come home along in time to end our old age at Bank Side."

Well, he was young and wonderful full of hope and trust, and he loved the girl too well for his peace. And as she was minded for Canada also, which was his desire, he didn't argue much about that. He wanted to face the music, however, same as Geoffrey Staines had done, and saw no reason whatever why they should fly in secret when they could walk off in triumph. But she was firm there.

"No," she said, "I can't face all the business of a wedding, and my relations, and Geoff's sour looks and Ernest Bloom's trouble. You've got to pick me up one night in the orchard and row me away. I'm set on it. I'm a very romantic girl, and that's my dream, and I hope you won't cross me, Reuben."

Well, 'twasn't his game to cross her, and, of course, he said it should be as she willed. He'd give notice to the Great Western Railway and look into the State-aided passages to Canada, and have all ship-shape inside a few weeks. And then he'd slip off along with her according as she pleased. "Though as my face be known on the railway from Newton Abbot to Plymouth, I don't see how we can make ourselves scarce without somebody telling on us," said Halfyard.

"That's no odds so long as we'm once away," declared Amy. "We'll go to London and be married so quick as we can, and then we'll sail to Canada together!"

He saw plenty of objections, but felt 'twas no use naming them since she was set on this silliness. And from that day he set to work, keeping dumb as a mouse about it, till he'd got passages for himself and his wife, and a date for sailing six weeks hence.

When she had the date out of him, and the night he was to bring a boat to the orchard bank for her, she named the same night and time to Geoff. Then, she sat down and properly hugged herself to think what them men would do when they met at one o'clock in the morning on the river under the apple trees. Never a pang touched the giglet wench. She delighted in her wickedness, and her only care was how she would see the meeting herself and hear what

came of it between 'em. And meantime she told Geoffrey that she was going to be terribly friendly with Ernest Bloom, so as to throw people off the scent; and she told Reuben Halfyard the same.

And so she was; and before the appointed night, she had accepted Bloom on the quiet, but made him promise not to let out their engagement to a soul until she gave the word.

To plan such a piece of downright, bad-hearted folly shows what the girl was. Be blamed if you know what to call her exactly. To do such a thing didn't seem human altogether; for in the first place, it took no account of the feelings of they two honourable men, and in the second it showed a power of getting pleasure out of the misfortunes of other people which might be called properly devilish. Yet that's too hard a word perhaps. Parson said, later on, that Amy Bassett had got no heart; and may be that was the most charitable way to view her. Though that's to give the elf no blame at all, for if you haven't got a heart, it ain't your fault. Blamed, however, she must be by all proper thinking men and women; for heart or no heart, she'd got a head-piece and wits in it, and that she was doing a very outrageous and ondacent thing she couldn't fail to know. 'Twas an impish thought at best to bring them men together under the apple trees on the river's bank by night; but that's the amusing picture she kept in her mind's eye, no doubt, though she forgot all about their toil and labour before the great moment, and what they'd done for love of her, and what they meant to do.

At any rate they carried it through to the letter, and on a night full of bright moonshine each deluded creature, having made all things ready and plotted and planned the work ahead, set out on the stream for his great adventure.

Reuben Halfyard borrowed a boat from down river and came up to the tryst through Staverton Bridge, where it flung its many arches across the water; while as for Geoffrey Staines, he'd got his own boat, and he dropped down from Aller Mead with his new portmanteau in the bows of the skiff. He reached the landing first, and he'd made fast and looked about and seen nothing of Amy, so he'd lit his pipe and sat down in the stern of the boat to wait for her.

He was hid in black shadows and sitting silent as a

mouse, when there came a very unexpected sound, and instead of Amy's footfall on the bank, Geoff heard an oar on the river. And nothing could have surprised him more than that, for 'twas after one in the morning and all peaceful as the grave. But, peering out he saw a boat clear the bridge; and in two minutes the solitary man rowing it eased off and came quietly nosing into the bank a few yards below the spot where Geoffrey was moored. And then 'twas Reuben's turn to be surprised, for of all strange things he suddenly smelled tobacco on the pure air of night, and knew 'twas a pipe of shag somewhere close to his nose. And Amy, whatever else she could do, had not been known to smoke a pipe.

So they met each other, and as Reuben's boat stole in and he shipped his paddles, he heard t'other's voice, and found himself alongside farmer.

"What in thunder be you doing here?" cried Geoffrey, and Halfyard very near fell out of his boat in amaze to hear his rival's voice.

"'Tis for me to ax that question," he said, steadying himself. "My place is here to-night, and only mine, and if you've got our secret by some hidden trick, Staines, I hope you'll be a sportsman and clear out of this before she comes."

"The devil you do!" cried Geoffrey. "'Tis for you to clear out I should judge. You'm up to a very hateful thing trading on your knowledge to-night, Reuben Halfyard. And well you know it. And how you got the secret I'd like to hear another time; but not now. And if you're a decent man, as I always thought you to be, I order you to take your hook and get away and not let her see you here."

"You do amaze me," answered t'other. "'Tis for you to be gone surely, and for you to be properly 'shamed of yourself that you could thrust in here to-night. If you knew I was coming, you knew why I was coming; and you knew 'twas no place for you."

Geoff kept silent a moment, turning it over. Then he spoke.

"This beats me," he said. "Walk out on the bank, please, and listen to what I've got to say. I didn't know

you was coming, and I didn't suppose you knew I was coming."

They got out of their boats and stood under the apple trees in the moonlight staring at each other.

Reuben was the hot one, but Staines felt too puzzled to be angry yet, though he got so pretty quick.

"You must have knowed I was coming," he began, "else why did you come? I'm here about private business, and you've done a damned dirty thing to poke your nose in, and well you know it. The girl decided for me and willed I should take her out of this place by water to-night, and not bring her back till we was wedded. And that's nobody's business but ours; and if you was commonly decent, you'd understand as much. 'Tis a shameful thing you being here at all, and I should like to know why you be?"

"I'll tell you then," answered Reuben. "I'm here because I was bidden to come, and I'm just so much ashamed to see you here as you are to see me. 'Tis me that Amy Bassett have chosen. I'm the man; and to show you that's true and that you're mad, I may say we go to Canada in a fortnight, and I've thrown up my work on the G.W.R. She wanted it to be a surprise for the people; and I humoured her in that matter; and she was set on making a run for it to-night and——"

"Stop!" shouted Geoffrey. "I'll hear no more of this. What would you make of her? If this was true and—— But it ain't true. No woman in her senses would do a thing like this. 'Tis you be mad, not me. She's mine, and she always meant to be mine, and you're a liar."

They stared each at the other, and there's no doubt a natural feeling rose in Geoffrey Staines to fly at Reuben; but Halfyard had good reasoning powers, fortunately for them both, and he was grown deadly calm by now; and whatever Amy Bassett may have hoped would have happened, nothing in the way of a fight followed their amazing meeting. Geoffrey had gone so far as to clench his fists, however, and a word from Reuben might have had 'em at each other's throat. But he didn't speak it. His mind was more occupied with the faithless girl than the angry man afore him.

"Where be she now?" he asked. "I was to meet her here at half after one o'clock. And what time was you to meet her?"

"Half after one," answered Geoffrey, like a death-bell tolling.

"I'm afraid she ain't coming, however," said Reuben Halfyard. "And that being so, it wouldn't do no great use me and you fighting. You want to hammer me," he continued, "and 'tis a very natural wish on your part; but we're up against a cruel, shocking thing, so far as I can see, and it won't better it to beat each other. For she told me to meet her here to-night and fetch her away, and she told you the same. She's had her fun seemingly, and we needn't add to it by showing ourselves to her to-morrow with black eyes."

Staines was looking at the moon; and then suddenly he done a very unexpected thing and clutched Reuben by the shoulder.

"She's here!" he said.

"Not she—nor the ghost of she," answered Halfyard. But he was wrong, for Geoff had catched sight of something whiter than the moonlight in an apple tree not fifty yards up the orchard. In fact, the moon had given Amy away, and he'd seen a bit of her shift flash under a dark wrap. She was having the night of her life, no doubt, and watching them from her hidden perch with glee; but she didn't know Geoff had spotted her—and, but for the tell-tale white, he wouldn't have done so.

Then Staines made Reuben look, and Amy saw him pointing and was just going to jump down and make a bolt of it; but she hadn't got time. The men ran, and the game was up for her. So she stopped up aloft where she was, reckoning that the safest place. And they soon stood underneath.

"Be that you, Amy Bassett?" axed Halfyard very civil.

"And what if it is?" she answered back.

"Only that you be the one out of luck to-night, not us," he replied. "You've done a shameful, brazen thing by all accounts, and played with two decent men, and thought, no doubt, that nought mattered so long as you had your bit of blasted fun. And so you have. And here we are,

you see—both come at your command. And now, perhaps, you'll tell us what you be going to do about it."

He was very calm and collected. His voice had grown hard, for he hated her like hell by now, and she knew it well enough.

She tried to bluff, and peeped down at 'em from the apple tree like a naughty pixey. And lovely she looked, as Geoffrey admitted afterwards; but he turned against all pretty women from that night, and so did Reuben.

"You deserve it, both of you," declared the daring she. "If you hadn't been blind you'd both have seen I was only larking. I'm tokened to Ernest Bloom; and as neither of you had sense to find it out, and would keep on at me, I thought you both deserved——"

"That'll do!" thundered out Staines. "You God-forsaken little wretch! What do you know about what a man deserves? We didn't deserve you, anyway, and we've escaped the terror that flyeth by night, and saved our souls alive, thank the Lord. You'm no better than a witch, and I daresay if us was to get a broomstick, you'd fly away on it. But you shan't fly to no other man; you shan't break the heart of no other human but your unfortunate mother, I promise you. You've not done for me and Reuben, as you thought to; but you've damn well done for yourself!"

"I can look after myself all right, thank you, and always shall; and Mr. Bloom can look after me, if I can't," answered Amy. "And now, if you call yourself men, you'd best clear off—the pair of you. I don't want to spend the night up here."

"'Tis what we want now, not what you want," answered Geoffrey. "You've done your part, and no doubt hoped to see me and this man break our heads for your pleasure, after you'd broke our hearts. But our hearts ban't broke, I promise you; they'm sound as nuts and hard as stone to you. We've had a proper, merciful escape, and 'tis you will repent this work for evermore, not us. We'll go on our way rejoicing."

"Well, go on your way, then," she said. "If you be hot, I'm cold, and don't want no more of your play-acting."

Then Reuben spoke. He'd been deadly silent up to now,

thinking what to do next. He had a tell aside with t'other man, and when Amy made to come down the tree, Reuben ordered her to stop where she was. She called 'em a brace of cowards then, and began to get in a fright. For 'tis one thing to play wicked, thoughtless games on people, but quite another if you find they be going to hit back. And now Amy had to pay for her bit of mischief, and Geoffrey told her the price.

"You can come down now," he said presently. "You made a rare example of me and Reuben Halfyard, and no doubt you will have a grand time seeing your friends laugh at us to-morrow; but you can't have anything for nothing in this world, because that happens to be a law of nature. You thought you was going to have all the fun of the fair up your apple tree, while we hammered each other and made the fur fly. But fools though we are, we ban't such big fools as that. Reuben holds his way and will go to Canada; and I shall get home, a wiser man; and you be going to spend the rest of the night anchored in mid-stream in my boat. And when they find you, you can tell 'em all about it, and Ernest Bloom also. No doubt 'twill interest him more than anybody. So come down, if you please."

She protested and called 'em all the names she could lay her tongue to, and she told 'em she was only in her night-gown with a cloak thrown over it, and would catch her death. But they was quite calm and resolute, and Reuben said if she didn't catch more than her death, she'd be a lucky woman. And he added that if she didn't come down he'd climb up and fetch her.

So down she came, and in five minutes they had her in Geoffrey's boat, with her hands tied behind her back, and her feet roped together, and her body made fast to the seat of the boat aft. They didn't hurt her, but they made it impossible for her to move, and they anchored her in Geoffrey's boat, fifty yards up-stream from Staverton Bridge, where the world could find her when it woke up. Then they went off in t'other boat and left her without more words. She heard the screech owls in the great woods and the splash of the salmon going up-stream, and she saw the moon set and day dawn in fullness of time. And for company she had her thoughts.

Almost the first letter that Reuben Halfyard got from home, when he reached Canada, was one from Geoffrey Staines, and this is a bit took from it :

" Old Sam Thorne, going to his work over the bridge, was the first to find her, half after five o'clock, and he raised the alarm ; and in half an hour or so Policeman Atkins put out and fetched her ashore. By that time a fair rally of neighbours was on the bridge and the bank, and Atkins wanted for a full and particular account from Amy and thought his fortune might be made over the case. But much to his surprise, she refused to tell him a word ; and to this day she wouldn't have let out about her adventure if it hadn't abeen for Ernest Bloom. As the man who meant to marry her, he insisted on getting the facts—not that he ever got 'em from her. She told him a yarn, of course, and he came to me to knock my head off. In truth, he went so far as to say he was going to have me before the justices and get me five year in clink, if it took him all his fortune. But being a reasonable creature, with his wits sharpened in the United States, he listened to my tale in patience, and heard the naked truth. And he's going back to Virginia next week, so he tells me ; but not along with Amy Bassett.

" And now the facts be pretty well advertised, and, so far, I haven't met man or woman that much blames me, or you either.

" She wants for her mother to sell Bank Side, and get out of Staverton, and go far ways off, where her sins ban't known ; and no doubt it will happen. In fact I've made the old woman an offer myself. But that terror of a girl can't change her nature no more than a stoat its smell ; and go where she may, she'll work ruin among the males. As for me, I've got my eye on Nancy Ford, whose virtues be inside, not out ; and I hopes as you'll find yourself suited afore long. But don't, for Lord's love, take a pretty one. The only place for pretty women be in pictures on walls, where they can't do no harm."

GOD'S GOOD BEAST

GOD'S GOOD BEAST

UNDERSHAW Farm, for all its snug situation and sun-facing front, is among the loneliest habitations at the southern foothills of Dartmoor. Not a cottage stands within sight of it, and the nearest hamlet lies four miles distant by road. The two-storeyed dwelling-house, now bright under a new coat of rosy wash, lies bowered in apple trees, which lift their topmost branches to its thatch; before the entrance extends the farm-yard, surrounded by stables, cow-stalls, and a great barn famous for its oaken beams; behind the habitation spread the orchard and a little sloping meadow. The grass flashes emerald bright in spring time; the more brilliant by contrast with dense, hanging woods of beech, whose grey boles hem the Undershaw forest ascending upwards to the moors above. The farm fields lie below and the farm road winds away among them. Another road skirts the yard and then climbs steeply by a rough and water-worn ascent, through the great woods behind.

Walter Snell, who succeeded his father at Undershaw, seldom left home, yet now, on this April morning, he was about to do so and his wife, his widowed sister, and a flock of children assembled to see so rare an event.

Walter was only going away for three days, to attend a cattle fair on the other side of the moor; but an incident so exceptional awoke his simple circle to great excitement.

"A town's a town," said Mrs. Snell, "and since you be going to a town, father, I've drawed out a list of things you've got to fetch along."

"What the hoss can carry, I'll bring," declared the farmer, and he ran his eye over the rough heads of two small girls and three small boys. The least of these in short frocks stood by his mother, while she held a baby in her arms. "And I won't forget Maggie, nor Milly, nor Jack, nor Bob, nor Timothy, nor you, Anna."

He turned to his widowed sister as he spoke—a slight, fair woman older than Walter, but like him. He was short, sturdy, and of a high colour, with large shoulders, pale whiskers, and a well-shaped head. Great physical strength belonged to Walter Snell and he enjoyed other blessings of good sense and a laughter-loving, easy nature. An old man held his horse, but he delayed and still chattered, while his children showered entreaties for toys, and their mother called for silence.

"Be quiet, Maggie, and you, Jack, and get to work, Bob. Why for should us all be wasting our time because father's going to the fair? And if he was to bring half you want he—— But don't forget the wool, father; and if you can pick up a box of kippers, such as you got ten year ago, 'twould be a great addition."

"And mind that turkey food, master," urged the ancient who held his horse. "There ain't no call for you to bring it, but you'll do wise to order it. The young turkeys be a brave lot and 'tis a thousand pities not to favour 'em all us may."

"Trust me, Jonas. I've got it wrote down. And remember you mend that loose board in the orchard fowl-house, else us shall have the foxes in. Drat 'em! There was a pair of 'em in the meadow last night dancing together as if the place belonged to 'em. Well, good-bye, all. And if you childer can't be good, be so good as you can!"

Having cracked this old jest, Mr. Snell kissed his wife, patted the last baby's cheek, and mounted a great, grey cob. He disposed himself in the saddle, uttered a few more directions to Jonas Blake, his head man, and then jogged solidly off with Jack and Maggie running beside him. They trotted the best part of half a mile, then stopped, waved final salutes and walked back together.

Maggie was a pretty little flaxen child of ten years old, who promised to be a beauty, for she had her mother's blue eyes and pure complexion. She was spoiled and ruled the other children by force of character, though Jack, the eldest, numbered two more years than she. He was a red boy—freckled and fiery; and then came Bob—a brown, shy person, who hated strangers and loved the woods; Milly, also brown and shy, and the sworn ally of Bob; and Tim-

othy, his mother's pet. The girls were already useful and Mr. Snell was proud of Jack, who, at twelve, hated school, and longed to be on the land. At present, in Easter holidays, all the children were at home all day, but the elder ones made nothing of the tramp to the village in term time.

The household, despite its loneliness, was entirely happy, and also prosperous, for Mr. Snell owned his land and house, knew his business, farmed diligently, took long views and balanced his good years against his bad with native intelligence. He came of thrifty folk, and had married a single-hearted, hard-working wife, who loved the business of maternity and saw no shame in a quiver-full. In her husband's sister she had a helper worthy of her, and Jane Snell always declared that Anna would some day marry again, if ever a man invaded the lonely homestead and discovered her quality.

But few came that way and the only bachelor who worked for Walter Snell lived with his mother a mile distant.

Now the farmer trotted through the lanes ; then climbed by gradual stages to the moors. On his way he met a traveller and bade him " good morning " after his usual friendly fashion.

The wayfarer looked at him and nodded, but did not speak.

He was a tall, lean man in knickerbockers, and his strange face arrested the rider. It was bearded and, out of a small head, there stared a pair of wonderful eyes. They were large and brown, and they seemed to blaze with inner fire from under a flat, cloth cap which the tourist wore. His countenance was haggard and he went slowly, with a long stride. It seemed to Snell that there was something furtive and helpless about the man. The farmer turned in his saddle and watched him. He appeared exhausted, yet kept alert and pushed steadily on.

The stranger's eyes stuck in Walter's memory, for he had never seen such a pair before.

He jogged forward, breasted a hill or two, and then sighted a neighbour's farm that lay ten miles from his own and was even more lonely. It stood in a hollow of the waste, and before the low entrance a trout stream ran, with the morning sunlight glittering upon it.

Snell's eyes were keen, and, though over a mile away, he

perceived some unusual movement about the place. Half-a-dozen dun-coloured figures appeared round the door and several black-clad men moved among them. He knew John White of Brook Ford and considered whether he would join the throng, but decided to mind his own business and go his way.

"It looks parlous like as if he'd got the bailiffs in," reflected Mr. Snell, screwing his eyes to help his vision, "and nobody wouldn't be much surprised perhaps; but I hadn't heard it was come to that."

He loosed rein and galloped a mile; then walked up a bridle track and kept steadily forward for another hour, till his destination, a market town on the eastern frontiers of the great table-land, glimmered grey in the vale of a river, five miles distant.

Presently Walter fell in with other outlying men on horseback, met an acquaintance he had not seen for a year, and descended with him to the little township beneath.

Meantime the weary pedestrian with the glowing eyes had followed Walter's own route, and, soon after noon, found himself beneath Undershaw. He had seen the great woods from afar and set his course in that direction. Then he came upon the farm, wiped his forehead, made some effort to clean his muddy boots, and washed his long white hands in the rill that bubbled out of the forest and was caught in a drinking-trough at the farmyard gate.

The man showed every sign of great physical weariness, and was, indeed, sinking for food. Here, doubtless, it might be found; he knocked at the door just as Jane Snell and her family were sitting down to dinner.

The unusual incident of a visitor sent Timothy and Milly flying to their mother's apron-strings; but she scolded them, while Maggie, who feared nothing, left her bacon and potatoes and went to the door.

The tall stranger smiled at her and asked if he might see her father or mother, whereupon Jane, a deep-breasted woman of broad beam and solid substance, arose and appeared at the porch. The man had already sat down on a chair that stood there.

He spoke very courteously in a deep voice and with refined accents.

" Pray forgive me for troubling you, but I am unwell. I have lost my way and walked many miles over the moors, and I am really in great suffering for need of food. I should be exceedingly obliged if you could spare me anything—a little bread and cheese perhaps, and a drink of milk. Can you manage this ? "

" Of course, sir. We be taking dinner this minute. You'm welcome I'm sure. Will 'e come in, or have it out here ? "

" How good of you ! But I'm in Devonshire, thank God ! Yes, I'll come in gladly, if I may. Where am I ? "

He followed her, sat down beside her and smiled at the battery of young eyes fixed on him.

Mrs. Snell helped him generously, and watched brute hunger struggle with the table habits of a man gently born. He ate fast and drank at a draught the cup of milk that Jack poured for him.

" Forgive me," he said. " I hope none of you young people will ever be so horribly hungry as I was. I've had no breakfast, and I began to think something terrible would happen to me till I saw your beautiful home."

" A very good thing you did, sir," ventured Maggie, " for there ain't no other house for a cruel long way."

" It was a very good thing, my dear."

He ate of the bacon and potatoes and consumed part of a batter pudding ; then he finished with some bread and cheese and uttered a long sigh.

" I live again," he said.

His hunger sated, he amused the children with stories, then rose and stretched himself. So tall was he that his hands touched the ceiling.

Presently the young people went off and Mrs. Snell retired to her baby and left the stranger with Anna. He was comfortable and at his ease now and showed no immediate desire to depart. He displayed a keen interest in his hostess and the establishment of the farm, and Anna, who liked talking but rarely had an opportunity to do so, chattered and laid bare the family history after the manner of her kind. He learnt all there was to know, and complimented the young widow.

" You'll be married again yourself before long, I expect,"

he said. And she answered frankly that she hoped it might happen.

"Us be so out of the world here," she explained, "that we seldom see a strange face, old or young."

Then he asked where the master was.

"I should like to see him and thank him for his hospitality," said the visitor.

"He'm away to Tawton fair for three days," she answered.

"And who looks after you all?"

"We look after ourselves. We ban't feared. Thieves don't come where there's nought for 'em."

Presently Mrs. Snell returned and the stranger declared that he must start.

"I want to go through the woods to the next village before night. I have friends there who will take me in," he declared.

"Widecombe?" she asked, and so told him what he wanted to know.

"Yes, ma'am, Widecombe."

"Maggie will show you a short cut, and if you see keeper, you can say you'm a friend of Mr. Snell's," declared Jane. Then Maggie was summoned, to her delight, and presently set off.

"I can't thank you enough, and I'm not going to offer you anything but thanks," said the tall man, shaking hands heartily with Jane. "But I shan't forget Undershaw in a hurry, and I shall give myself the great pleasure of sending some little gifts to the youngsters presently."

Then he started with Maggie as guide, shortening his long steps to keep pace with her.

They soon vanished into the woods together, and Anna and her sister-in-law discussed the tall stranger when he was gone.

"Did you ever see such a funny pair of eyes?" asked the younger. "They gave me the creeps till I got used to 'em, and yet you might say they was beautiful."

"He's one of them artists, I shouldn't wonder," decided Jane. "He was a bit queer, but they be always a bit queer, —unlike common folk, always on wires and look at life terrible fantastic. Must be a sad thing to be born so. But a gentleman for all his trouble seemingly."

Maggie led the stranger through the woods, and, finding him very amiable, prattled with her accustomed vivacity. A quarter of a mile from the farm, amid undergrowth of laurel and rhododendron, a deserted mine adit gaped in the forest. Its mouth opened black in the gloom of a thicket and marked a long-forgotten and futile enterprise, where men had mined the hill for copper.

"That's a terrible queer old place," she told him. "A proper cave, and only brave ones will go in. Jack went in a long way once; but he got feared and soon came out again. I wouldn't go in. But us plays our games here sometimes and pretends the wicked ogre lives in there and will pop out and catch us and eat us if we don't run for dear life."

"Let's have a look at it," the tall man answered. He appeared to be interested in the tunnel. They examined it and he told her it was the ruined entrance of a mine. "I dare say all sorts of queer things live in there now," he said.

"But not the foxes," explained Maggie. "The foxes have their cubby holes far ways off on the moor; but they come here to catch the rabbits and play about. I've see'd 'em playing sometimes; and of a night you can hear 'em barking and the owls answering them. 'Tis terrible wisht in the woods of a night, master."

They proceeded until light glinted along the summits of the trees and the crown of the hill hove up behind them.

"We'll sit and rest a minute," said the traveller, "and I'll show you something. Come and sit on my lap. You're a very pretty girl, Maggie, and I'll send you a fine present soon. What would you like—a big doll?"

He had won her completely and she sat on his knee with his arm round her.

"I'd dearly love one of they proper, waxen dollies what open and shut their eyes. May Endicott have got one; a visitor who boarded along with her mother sent it."

"You shall have one. I won't forget; it shall come to Miss Maggie Snell, Undershaw Farm."

"Will you really?"

"Now I'll show you a pretty thing."

He fumbled in his coat and brought out an Eastern weapon—long and sharp. It was a Damascus dagger with Persian letters in gold upon the steel and a handle of old,

yellow ivory adorned with bosses of pink coral and green jade.

At the haft was a tiny smear of red, which the stranger rubbed off.

"My! What a grand knife!" cried Maggie.

"Isn't it? And sharp—sharp!"

He drew it very gently along her little round throat, and his great eyes burned.

"I expect people have been killed with this knife in the old days, Maggie."

"Fancy! I hope they was wicked people and not good ones," she said.

"People have got to die and go to Heaven. You'll die some day—so shall I."

"I hope you won't die afore you send me my dolly, master."

"No, no; not before that. Now I must get forward and you must show me the road to Widecombe. There's a song about Widecombe Fair, isn't there?"

"I know it!" answered the child proudly. "I'll sing it to you if you mind to hear it."

"I'd like to hear it."

So she sang "Widecombe Fair" and he stroked her cheek and praised her heartily. They parted presently with a kiss. She showed him his way and he set out upon it. In a moment he appeared to have forgotten the child; and once upon the open road, his eyes surveyed the distance and the heathery undulations round about. Then, when Maggie had gone, he turned back, regained the shelter of the woods, waited, lying under a holly bush till the sun had descended beneath the hills, and then slunk into the depths of the trees again. He remembered the path and presently, finding the tunnel of the old mine adit, entered it and crept forward into the darkness. He did not again emerge.

And while his daughter ran home to tell of her adventures, Walter Snell enjoyed the fun of the fair, met old friends and bought some promising lambs. In the evening he was out again and wished that a child or two were with him to ride on the merry-go-rounds; then he returned to his inn and spent an hour in the public bar before retiring.

Now, for the first time, he remembered the incident at Brook Ford on his morning ride; but none knew of anything to call a crowd to that lonely spot.

"You be little better'n foreigners you chaps t'other side of Dartymoor," chaffed a man. "And yet you think us town folk must know all about your business."

Another spoke, however, who was informed.

"If you mean John White to Brook Ford, you'll never see him no more, nor yet his wife, nor yet his daughter," said a policeman in plain clothes. "A proper, hugeous tragedy. They'm all dead!"

"John White dead! Why for? I see'd the man a month ago and never better!" cried Mr. Snell.

"He's dead because a knife was drove into his heart," answered the other. "And his poor wife was slaughtered same way, and Nelly White, tokened to a man at Postbridge, was killed also. An awful upstore! And we ain't at the end of it yet, I expect."

"God's goodness!" gasped Mr. Snell. "That's what all they people was there for then! He lies nine or ten miles up over from my place, and I see'd the crowd as I passed by. Did he kill hisself?"

"Not him. It's murder, and us knows the criminal; and 'tis feared as he'll do in a few more afore he's taken."

The bar hummed.

"White never had an enemy in his life but himself," said Mr. Snell. "I've knowed the man years and years, and a peacefuller creature don't walk. His only fault be whisky, and that only off and on."

"'Twas a raging madman done it," explained the policeman. "'Tis like this. A maniac's got out of the asylum to Newton and cleared for the moor. He was away last night; but firstly, he'd gone into the head doctor's room, where there was a lot of curiosities under glass, and he took a steel knife of great value with him. 'Twasn't known he'd gone much before nightfall; but the dark came down and no sight of him. And this morning the cowman, taking in the milk at Brook Ford, found the house locked and couldn't get nobody to come when he hallowed. Then he see a back window broke and went in, and found the master dead in the hall, and his wife the same up over, and the poor girl

stabbed in her bed. The man's a gentleman what done it—a very civil-spoken, long-legged chap. He killed two people before he was put away a year ago, and one was his own brother. 'Tis thought he's harbouring in the woods at Dartmeet, for a boy said he'd seen a tall, bearded chap going along fast that way, but——"

Walter Snell interrupted. He had grown very pale and his words throttled each other.

"A bearded man—tall—and—and? How was he dressed? Do they know?"

"In tweeds and knickers and a flat cloth cap so the telegram says. The constabulary's out all round. No money, but a watch and——"

"God's light! I met him not four mile from Undershaw this morning, and he was going that way!" cried Walter Snell.

"Then you'd better get back, neighbour," urged the innkeeper, "so quick as your hoss will take you."

The policeman was concerned.

"How far is it?" he asked. "Them that know say, if he ain't taken, he's dead sure to kill again to-night. He's strong and awful cunning—what's called homicidal. He can't help it, of course, poor wretch. The folk are being warned all round about. Be your hoss good to take you home?"

Mr. Snell was girding himself for a struggle.

"My hoss is slow and sure. I must have something quicker. 'Tis twenty mile. Is there any man here as can lend me a hunter, or a hoss that can gallop?"

A young farmer, who had listened to this conversation, jumped up.

"Yes," he said. "I've got a valuable mare if you can ride."

"I can ride anything. I'll take proper care of her."

"She's only five minutes away—half a hunter. Her'll do all you want if you don't use a whip."

They buzzed round Walter and the policeman asked if it were possible to telegraph, but Snell said: "No. We'm far ways off in the heart of the hill and no telegraph for ten miles. 'Tis twenty mile I've got to go and now 'tis past ten o'clock; but I'll get there by midnight, or near it. I know the road—all pretty good going."

They spoke words of encouragement.

"Be sure you only met some harmless chap," said the innkeeper. All the same 'tis your duty to get home as fast as you can. I hope to God you'll hear this madman's catched. Then us shall see you back presently."

"My house be full of women and childer," explained Walter Snell, "and if he was to get in among 'em—— There, I mustn't think of it. Here's the hoss."

"You'm inside the law to shoot him dead to save life," explained the policeman. "Have 'e got a gun?"

"Yes, yes—I've got a gun. I bain't feared—if I only get there in time."

The horse, destined to carry Snell on his famous ride, was trotted up by the owner, and Walter found words to thank him. "Trust me. If any ill befalls, I'll make all good," he promised.

The men tumbled out of the bar to see the start, and the policeman promised that at the earliest moment possible the law should hasten to the farmer's protection.

"Thank God 'tis brave moonlight and the poor chap will see his way," said an old man; and presently the subject shifted to the recent tragedy, for none knew of what happened that day at Undershaw or entertained any suspicion of the awful danger that threatened it.

Happily, Walter Snell himself was as ignorant as the rest. He suffered sufficiently notwithstanding. He understood horses, however, kept his nerve, rode a big black mare with restraint and only pushed her when the last five miles remained to ride. The night was crystal clear and still. Two policemen challenged Walter on the high moor, and he pulled up for half a minute to explain his purpose. The man, they said, had not been caught; and when Walter told them that he had probably seen him early in the day, they felt doubtful. The hue and cry had taken another direction and it was thought that the maniac harboured near Two Bridges in mid-moor. The police were mounted, and, bidding Mr. Snell not loose rein, followed him.

At last he was in his own familiar country and galloping along a level lane a mile from his home. Already ahead he could see the black masses of the woods, and soon marked the peaceful face of the farmhouse, grey under the moon.

He had come faster than he hoped, for it was still just short of midnight. Unspeakable peace brooded over the deep coomb and it seemed impossible that any evil thing could have fallen here. But not Walter Snell, or his fine horse came in time to save the household.

An hour earlier, the bearded man had crept from his hiding place and the long, lean shape of him, hungry for the lives that lay beneath, slipped through the shadowed woods.

He stole from tree to tree, avoided the clearings where the silver light rained down, and stood silent, sometimes listening intently for a footfall. He descended—a tiger, with a poisoned human brain to guide the beast of prey. He had noted Undershaw closely while at his meal in the kitchen and he purposed entering by a window that opened upon the back side of the dwelling. From the house-place a flight of stairs ascended to the rooms above.

He stood at the edge of the woods before eleven o'clock and marked the farm below. Every light was out, and he knew that the women and children were asleep. Once he thought he heard a dog baying the moon, and muttered to himself; but the sound came from behind him and was far distant. He descended by the forest hedge until only the meadow separated him from the orchard trees that girdled the farm. Then he passed out into the moonlight and stole across the dewy grass. The moonlight flashed in his eyes and the lust of his mania horribly transfigured his mournful face.

An hour later Walter Snell woke the echoes and banished silence. Fifty yards from the farm gate he lifted his voice and roared: "Jane! Jane! Jonas! Anna!"

He clattered up still shouting, and leapt from his horse. The great creature stretched her legs and stood panting, while her dripping coat gleamed in the moonlight. A moment afterwards the farmer thundered at his door and shouted until echoes from barn and byre raised a din that reverberated to the woods above. A cock crowed from his hidden perch, and another answered him. Then Walter's own bedroom window opened above his head and somebody looked out.

It was Jane Snell, and he saw his wife's massive form and round face white in the moonshine.

"God's goodness!" she cried. "Is that you, Walter?"

"Be all well? Be all well? Speak, woman!"

"Why not? Of course all be well. What should be ill?"

"The childer?"

"Man alive, what's happened? Have 'e gone mad?"

"Come down house and let me in," he said, and when Jane descended, she found Walter upon his knees outside the door thanking his Maker.

"The watching Lord—the watching Lord! Us must worship Him better from this day, Jane," he grunted.

"Us worship Him all right, my dear soul, and always have I should think. Be you drunk, or what is it? You've given me the shock of my life. A nursing mother didn't ought to be treat like this, Walter."

"You'll thank God on your knees, same as me, that you wasn't treated no worse in a minute," he answered, rising to his feet. "Wake Jonas, and tell him to go out to the mare I've rode home. Twenty miles—a grand mare! The goodness of people be past belief. I must see all the childer—every blessed one of 'em. They don't go out of my sight till morning—nor yet you, nor Anna. There's a man-killing lunatic broke loose, and he's down this way somewhere, for I saw him with my own eyes; and last night he slew John White and his wife and daughter."

Jane gasped and lumbered upstairs. A child or two had already wakened at the noise, and Timothy, who slept in an attic next to old Jonas Blake, was heard to cry. In two minutes Walter had embraced them all. Then Blake drew on his trousers and went out to the mare, while the family, with Anna, assembled in the house-place.

The smouldering fire of peat was roused and the lamp lighted.

Walter demanded food, ate and drank, and told his story guardedly, not to frighten the children. But indeed all save Maggie and Jack were soon asleep again, with childhood's unquestioned acceptance of wonders. Blankets and pillows were brought from above, and there they slumbered, while their father brought his gun down from its place over the mantelshelf and loaded both barrels.

They had much to tell him too, and even Maggie lost her courage and grew very white and fearful when she heard of the awful peril in which she had stood that day.

"If it don't make you the best girl in Dartmoor, it did ought," said her mother.

Jonas presently returned, having rubbed down and fed the precious steed and locked her up; then the tale was told again just as the mounted police arrived.

They stopped an hour, baited their horses, heard all there was to hear from Mrs. Snell, and, at the first glimmer of day, ascended into the wood; but it was not they who told the end of the story.

Jonas had been prowling round the house at dawn and ran back before five o'clock. He was rheumatic and hopped like a lame bird. His eyes were goggling, and his head shaking when he appeared, just as Anna had brewed some tea and cut a pile of bread and butter. At daylight Walter had fallen asleep in his chair, with his gun on his knees, but Jonas waked him and screamed to him to come out of doors.

"All's ended! 'Tis done, and we be saved alive!" piped the ancient man. "Come up over for the Lord's sake. The wretch be paid in his own bloody coin. He's a goner!"

Walter hastened through the orchard, to see an object like a fallen scare-crow lying twisted and grotesquely distorted twenty yards from the hedge.

"'Tis him—the loony," explained Jonas.

"And that's Bold Turk's work last night. You can see how 'twas. He came slipping down like a snake over the grass when us was all dead to sleep. But little the monster knew what was waiting for him. I've always said Bold Turk be death by night to anything alive."

They entered the field fearlessly enough, and stood for a moment over a mangled and broken corpse that scarcely held together. And ten yards away, sticking upright in the turf, was a knife with an ivory handle.

A low bellow, half gutteral, half shrill, sounded close at hand, and Bold Turk ambled amiably up to his master. He was a white bull, with short, stubby horns, and mighty head and chest. His knees were stained red.

"He'm God's good beast, Jonas," said Mr. Snell, stroking the huge brute's nose with a shaky hand. "Never do I part with him—not for his weight in gold and diamonds. Get a hurdle, will 'e, and a sack or two."

THE VAMP-DISH

THE VAMP-DISH

We was telling about signs and wonders, and what our grandfathers believed ; and some said the world was a better place when the folk had more faith ; but old Tom Bewes, the vicarage gardener, he swore that the less you took on trust, the less often you'd be a loser. In fact, he was a very non-believing sort of man, and if the vicar had heard some of his opinions, as he spoke in the public bar of " The Seven Stars " that night, Tom wouldn't have been vicarage gardener no more.

And the evening us heard this tale, Tom Bewes and Jerry Stockman, the sexton, had one of their arguments, because Jerry named a very famous tradition about our font at church, that never one baptised in it was ever hanged ; but Tom, he flouted it, and vowed that no man with any credit for sense could believe such a tale.

" If I don't know, who should ? " asked Jerry ; and to show the truth of what he spoke, he spun us a yarn a hundred year old if not more, and none had the facts so well as him, because it happened in his own mother's family. And this was the yarn :

There was a time when Parson Steel reigned at Lower Town, which be the name of our village, and he was one of the old sort of parsons, which happily have died out of the land nowadays. He'd fought in the wars against France, and when they were over, his father couldn't give him nothing but a church living. But 'twas all one to Dick Steel, so long as he might live an open-air life, and have plenty of hunting and shooting and fishing, and other more doubtful diversions. So he took Holy Orders and came to Lower Town and followed his bent, which was to let everybody go

their own way, so long as they let him do the like. But if anybody hinted he weren't the man for the job, he very quick showed his teeth ; and soon the people got to know their hopes of salvation weren't going to be much bettered by Parson Steel.

There's a hundred stories about his goings on. 'Tis said he stopped the Exeter coach once, and made a hundred guineas by it. In fact, every outrageous deed as happened in these parts, in them days, was believed to start with him. And, as like will to like, he found a very willing and able partner in his wild ways ; and the man was Teddy Snow, Farmer Snow's son, at Green Hayes farm, in this parish.

As for Farmer Snow himself, he strove to turn his son into Christian ways ; but when the holy head of the parish was such a man as Parson Steel, few well-meaning fathers could hope for much. There were complications, because you couldn't quarrel with Dicky Steel. Everybody loved him against their better natures ; and though the people shook their heads at his terrible reckless conduct, not a man in the parish but admired him in an uneasy sort of fashion. So did the women ; because, though a godless blade pretty near all round, with little to be said for him, where women was concerned he'd never been known to do anything unworthy of his cloth, or what didn't become a gentleman born.

But he fell in love at last, much to the surprise of the folk, though it weren't strange in reality, for the rough-and-tumble maid that took his eye might well have been just the one to do so.

Jenifer Snow was Teddy's sister, and there's no doubt she'd lent him a hand in some queer feats now and again, and when Teddy fought Pedlar Triggs, a Plymouth middleweight, for twenty-five pounds a-side, and beat him, it was Jenifer, much to the scandal of " the fancy " that seconded her brother in the ring. Parson Steel found the money for Ted, and at the ring-side he met Jenifer for the first time, I believe. She was a big girl, within an inch so tall as her brother—a fair, flaxen thing, and handsome, and hard as nails, and up for anything a woman could do in the sporting line, or what they couldn't, for that matter.

A good few was after her, but she hadn't any use for the

men, and when she wasn't in mischief with Teddy, she bided at home and did woman's work, and minded the dairy, and was so good a daughter as her parents could wish for. All the same, Jane Snow, her mother, felt very wishful to see the girl married and settled; and when presently parson began to find reasons for visiting Green Hayes, and was amazing smooth-spoken for him, and very civil indeed to Mrs. Snow, and very attentive to the good advice of farmer, then Jenifer's mother began to have her suspicions.

Her husband preached to the vicar a lot better than ever the vicar preached to the people; for the Reverend Dicky, when he got in the pulpit, never was known to bide there five minutes at a stretch. His custom was to give out a good text, and then tell the folk 'twas all there in holy words, and didn't want no turning and twisting from him.

"I can't say nothing better than the Book, my friends," Dicky would tell 'em, with his hawk's eyes rolling over the few as ever went to hear him. "So you just remember the plain Scripture words, and when you find yourselves in two minds, say 'em over and the Light will come. 'Twould only fog that Light if I was to begin messing about with it and chattering to you." Then he'd speak the text again: "Love one another," or "Do as you'd be done by," or what not, and leave it at that to soak in. I daresay there's worse ways of preaching.

Farmer Snow gave him a lot of good advice, and there's no doubt, for his own ends, parson was very patient, and promised to reform here and there and steady down. He also vowed most solemnly that he wouldn't egg on Teddy Snow to wickedness, though, Lord, He knows, the youngster didn't want much egging on; and while Steel, to win Jenifer, went a bit lighter for a time, and did a bit of parson's work in the parish, and raised hopes that he'd sowed his wild oats and was settling down, Teddy, on the contrary, went from bad to worse.

He would do evil simply for the sake of doing it. He'd been spoiled a bit by his mother perhaps, and she doted on him still. And she always repeated the famous fact that nobody baptised in our vamp-dish could ever be hung. That had been proved, so 'twas said, and in them wild and ignorant days many wives of bad fathers would bring their

childer a score of miles to Lower Town, so as their little necks should be safe against the rope come they grew up Mrs. Snow most steadfastly believed this great fact, so when farmer shook his head, after some hateful piece of work from Teddy, and said the boy would die in his boots by the hand of Jack Ketch as sure as fate, Jane Snow told him, that whatever fell out, that couldn't be.

'Twas like that when two things happened—one to the Reverend Dicky and t'other to Ted. Parson found himself properly in love with Jenifer, and flinging aside any thought of the difference in their positions and so on, set to work with all his might and main to win her ; and Master Teddy's pitcher went once too often to the well and got cracked. He was catched by three stout men poaching in Dart Vale, where the lord of the manor lived. They'd winded his plans, through an informer, and marked him down one November night.

Now stealing game was very near a hanging job in them days, which Teddy knew. He put up a great fight and broke a man's arm ; then he got his own head broke, and, but for God's mercy and his thick skull, that would have been an end of him. But he came round three hours after, to find himself in clink, and the justices, who reckoned that Lower Town, under Parson Steel, was the washpot of the Devil, gived Teddy a year in gaol. So he disappeared for a bit, and a good few breathed the easier.

And meantime his reverence offered his hand and heart to Jenifer and courted her in a way straight and proper. Her mother, woman-like, was terrible proud, and so was her father for that matter. Everybody knew all about it, for the clergyman made no secret of his love for her, and his own parents came to Lower Town for a month the following summer and brought a very fine, rich maiden with 'em and tried to tempt him away from the woman he loved. But Dicky saw through that and told Snow and Jenifer and his own parents too, that 'twas no good trailing red herrings across the scent when he was running.

" There's only one woman on God's earth for me," he said to Jenifer, " and that pasty-faced, town-bred dowdy, with her mincing speech and airs and graces, be the moon to your sun."

But though he used all his wits, Dicky couldn't get "Yes" out of her. She liked him very well, and liked his ways, and there weren't a man she liked better; but something kept her off. She loved freedom and her own maiden life; and she was a lot down-daunted because her brother was locked up, and didn't seem to have no heart for courting. She had a bit of wickedness in her sleeve, too; because she'd found out the man who gave her brother's secrets away and was responsible for his downfall. The chap was called Nicholas Withycombe, a farmer t'other side of the Vale, and he bragged one night at Ashburton that it was him had laid Teddy by the heels. A friend told Jenifer, and she kept it warm for Withycombe against her brother came home.

But the Reverend Steel was the sort that didn't know when he was beat, so he hung on; and swore that if Jenifer didn't take him she should have no other.

Then Teddy came out afore Christmas, and though his parents welcomed him and hoped the treadmill had broke his hard heart, they soon found out it had not. He was pretty quiet for a bit and they began to think he'd mended, but the crash came at the New Year, and it looked as if even Mrs. Snow's trust in our church-font weren't going to save the situation.

When Teddy Snow heard tell about Nicholas Withycombe he made his plans, and one fine evening waited for him down by New Bridge on the river, when he knew as he'd be coming back from market. Teddy stopped him and told the man to take off his coat and fight there and then, or else take the leathering he was prepared to give. Nicholas could fight a bit, though he was noted for the white feather, and he drew two stone heavier than Teddy and stood three inches taller, so that none could say that Teddy offered anything unfair.

His sister and a couple of chaps was along with Snow, and three farmers happened to be going homeward with Withycombe. Nicholas didn't want to fight; but he had no choice, and they went down by an open place nigh the river and set to, with the reds in the sky and evening closing in on 'em.

It weren't a long fight, and Snow didn't mean as it should be. All the hatred and rage he felt to the informer got into

his muscles, and he went for Nicholas like a tiger. He was quicker, too, and got going before the bigger man could set himself. 'Twas a short, smashing job—a right and left fair on the face, then another right that just missed Withycombe's chin, and then one to the mark ; and when Nicholas clenched to get out of the storm, Ted wrestled like a bear and threw him proper heavy and fell on him. Which was very good for a start ; but unfortunately the job ended there, for where they'd chose to fight, on the green side, was a boulder half-an-inch out of the soil that they didn't know about ; and Withycombe went down, with his thirteen-stone weight behind him, on the back of his neck 'pon hard granite.

He was senseless and dead to the world from that moment ; and presently, when a cart came along, they got him in and drove him home. He lived a few days, but never come to himself no more ; and Parson Steel went over to Green Hayes that same night to beg Ted, for the love of the Lord, to be gone, and get down to the sea and out of the country in the first ship as would take him.

But Dicky was too late. They'd heard all about it to Ashburton, and Ted, while he sat listening to Steel, found the constables round the house. He bolted, but they took him in the stable getting on a horse, and when Nicholas Withycombe went out of life, there was a proper uproar as to whether it would be manslaughter or murder. It went very much against Teddy that he'd given out afore all men he was going to break Withycombe's neck ; which was pretty much what he had done ; and so the dead man's family was terrible keen on getting the gallows for him.

He came up at the Assizes to Exeter ; and by ill-luck, a hanging judge had the job, for such men was common on the bench in them days. He summed up against Snow, and Teddy's witnesses hadn't shone neither, and the jury didn't see much beyond the fact that a respectable member of the community and the father of five had been done to death by a notorious evil liver, who was much better hanged and under the daisies than on 'em. So, almost before he fully understood his fix, Master Teddy found himself brought in guilty of murder, and saw the black cap go on, and listened to a bit of ugly news. He was to be took back to the place

from where he came, which was Exeter gaol, and there hanged by the neck until he was dead ; and the judge hoped the Lord would have mercy on his soul, but didn't say it as if he meant it.

It was wrong in the opinion of a good many interested parties, though few thought twice about the matter, for lives didn't count so precious in them days as they do now, and it was only a short time since men had been hanged for sheep-stealing and stopping a coach. Besides, none felt in any doubt about the sort Teddy was, and even the most friendly gave it as their opinion that it was but a question of time in any case, and if young Snow didn't swing for this job, he'd be sure as sunshine to come to it sooner or later.

In fact, he was a doomed man from that hour, and only one creature on God's earth said he wasn't ; and that was his mother. Jane Snow, such is the unreasoning way of the female mind, stuck to it most steadfast that her son wouldn't die the shameful death, and she was saying the same, calm and tearless, in the parlour of Green Hayes on a night one week afore the hanging date, to her husband and daughter. And the woman's reason was the old one.

" No child baptised in our vamp-dish was ever hanged yet," she said. " It can't be. 'Tis against Almighty God's will and plan and there's an end of it."

His father had been to take his farewell of Teddy, and all was going so smooth and swift to the last, and not a hand lifted to save him ; for it was known that a petition would be all in vain, even if there was a dozen people to sign it ; and yet his old mother kept up her head and looked the people in the face according to her custom.

That night her husband broke down and lost his senses for a bit and said he'd put a bullet through his own brain when Teddy was gone ; so Mrs. Snow feared for the raving man and sent Jenifer for doctor.

She went, and doctor said he'd be round with a sleeping potion presently ; and Jenifer didn't go home, but called at the vicarage and asked to see his reverence. This job had hit Parson Steel very hard indeed, and 'tis certain he'd done pretty much all anybody could do to draw public attention to a failure of justice ; but there again the luck was against the doomed man, because Dicky didn't come into

the picture with very clean hands as a minister of God above suspicion. Folk said it was natural one rascal should stand up for another, and in fact the reverend gentleman carried no weight except with a few fox-hunters and rough customers as couldn't shake the wheels of justice, and didn't want to be in the public eye themselves. Then came Jenifer and found Dicky looking ten years older and tramping his dining-room, with knit brows and savage eyes, like a caged tiger.

She didn't waste no words, for she knew what was in his mind.

"I be come to say this, Dicky," she said. "If you'll save Teddy's neck, I'll marry you."

But so deep was he in thought that, strange to say, though he heard her, he didn't seem to take in the speech.

He gave a sort of snort, and his black eyes looked through her at her brother, long ways off in the condemned cell at Exeter.

But Jenifer didn't understand his silence.

"Maybe times is changed with you," she said, "and you wouldn't have no use for the sister of a hanged man."

Then he came to himself and took her in his arms and kissed her fiercely.

"I'd have use for the sister of Judas Iscariot, if she was like you," he said. "And I'm doing my best, though the cursed people won't listen to me. There's a dog's chance yet, I believe. I find the Governor of the gaol is an old soldier that I fought under in France. He's left the Service and got Exeter Prison as a reward for his work. He was a very good friend to me and liked my fighting. I've got ideas going round in my head, Jenifer. Would you care to see Teddy again?"

"Yes, I would, then."

"That much the Governor might grant. He doesn't know anything about me since the wars, and he was a very just man, though a terrible hard one. Something might come of it, though I can't say what."

They talked far into the night, but didn't get no forwarder, because it remained to be seen what sort of view the Governor would take. And such was his feelings for Teddy, the parson hadn't no time nor inclination to say much to

Jenifer about her fine offer. Nor did he do any love-making while he saw her home. And she liked him the better for it.

The next day he rode to Exeter, and that night he dined along with the Governor of the gaol; and his first ray of hope was soon out, for though the old Major Goodson held that Ted Snow hadn't fairly earned hanging, it was no business of his, and his duty was to see the young man drop, and his duty he'd do, as he had done it all his life. He was rather surprised to see Dicky Steel in the cloth, but as a very religious man himself, he paid all reverence to it, and, not knowing the reverend gentleman's record at Lower Town and round about, showed him every respect. And Parson Steel did his part, till you'd have thought he was cut out for a bishop.

"'Tis a fearful thing to lose one of my little flock like this," he said, "especially when I know it oughtn't to be."

Then he gave a picture of Teddy that was by no means such as was told at the trial, and the old Governor believed him and felt sorry that such a slur should fall upon the reverend gentleman's parish. They talked, and Dicky soon saw he'd be wasting his time and losing his credit to hint at a bit of a plot; so he didn't, and only asked, just afore he was leaving, if Jenifer might see her brother for the last time. He said that the young woman was devoted to the boy and that for the sake of humanity, she did ought to be allowed to take her leave of him and give him a message from his heart-broken mother. And the Governor granted that, and said he'd make the order himself.

Then Dicky said that, of course, she could see him alone and say her last farewell without alien eyes upon their parting. The girl, he said, couldn't be asked to stand strangers round her at such a moment. But the Governor wouldn't suffer this, and withstood all arguments, though Dicky pressed for it. But he made a last suggestion, and the major felt that might meet the case.

"If I go along with the poor child," said Dicky, "then the law wouldn't be flouted, seeing I've got nothing to do but my duty, as the shepherd. And being a man whose calling puts him above suspicion, I can support them in their trial and say the word in season, which I'm wishful to do for poor young Snow."

It seemed a reasonable thing that their pastor should support the poor wretches in their eternal farewell, and Dicky took such a wonderful high line and called on Heaven so loud that the old soldier felt that he was talking with the other tongues than human. In fact, he agreed to let it be so.

"For both their sakes I'll cut it short, and the turnkeys needn't give us above five minutes," said his reverence. "It will help poor Ted to go bravely, and will be a comfort to the girl and her mother. He's got a poor old father, too; and you can guess what my task is with them. It has made an old man of me, Major."

So it was left at that, and the soldier felt properly kindly to all concerned, for he was a parent himself.

Three days later parson undertook to be there at such an hour as permission might be granted; and sure enough, at the appointed time, Jenifer, so white as a ghost, and parson, drawn and haggard in his black, came on foot to the prison, where they were expected.

The Governor saw 'em for five minutes, and offered the poor young woman a glass of wine, but she only shook her head, and her companion explained that she was wishful for the fearful ordeal to be ended if possible afore she fainted. "And so am I," added the reverend gentleman. "And you, who have got a heart, Major, will guess what this means to me."

They went at last, the girl shaking, and parson holding of her up; and presently they came to the condemned cell, and, according to orders, his reverence and his parishioners was left alone for a matter of five minutes, rules and regulations being different then from what they are now. But 'twas far too much for Jenifer, and afore they'd faced Teddy above three minutes, parson knocked at the door and the turnkey opened it.

"Let us out of this for God's sake!" begged Dicky. "'Tis beyond the poor girl's strength."

He was holding Jenifer up. The unhappy creature shook with sobs, and her bright hair had fallen from under the little, red riding-hood she wore. She tottered and drooped like a withered flower, and 'twas all the clergyman could do to keep her on her feet. And his face was a proper hell of agony, too, with the sweat running down it.

The head turnkey, as looked after Teddy, chanced to be a fairly good-hearted man, and he liked young Snow, and felt terrible sorry for all concerned.

" Leave the poor fellow alone for five minutes, to recover his manhood, officer," said parson. " He's shook to the depths. 'Tis an awful wrench, because his sister was the dearest thing in the world to him."

And the gaoler thought that to be a word very becoming in a minister of the church ; and he said, after, that he bided a good ten minutes, for human kindness and out of consideration for the murderer's tears.

Then he went in, to find Teddy lying face downwards on his bed, and so left him a bit longer, till the hour of his evening meal.

And when they brought it, they discovered what I dare say you ban't much astonished to hear. Jenifer Snow, in her brother's breeches and coat, they found ; and they knew that their prisoner and the parson had got the best part of two hours' start of 'em.

There was a pretty bobbery as you may guess, and the Governor of the prison went very near mad when he heard tell the news. Because he reckoned, among a lot of other things, that it meant he'd lose his job for one.

They soon had mounted men out, but on a dark winter's night and no clues to the escaped man and his friend, they could do little ; because it was before the days of the telegraph and railways, so the law had a harder job to catch a malefactor than what it has now. A good few vagrant men were picked up on the roads that night ; but Teddy Snow was not one of 'em, and all they could learn was that his reverence and a maiden had rode up to an inn near the gaol and put up their horses for half an hour, then come back and rode off. An ostler knew that much, and he knew the clergyman carried a parcel, and no living man in Exeter knew more.

Then the news came to Lower Town next morn with mounted police from Exeter, and all they heard there was that the Reverend Steel hadn't been seen since the day before, when he'd rode off with Jenifer Snow on one of his hosses and himself on the other. And it weren't for a week after that, so slow did news travel in them days, that the

horses turned up at Plymouth. And another clue was reported from Haldon Heights, for there a labouring man found Jenifer Snow's gown and her hat and a few curls, made of lint white tow, the colour of her hair, which her brother had worn doubtless when he went past the turnkeys, with his face in a handkercher and his knees sagging under him and his arm in parson's. Over Haldon they'd gone in the dead of night ; and there, no doubt, the clothes, what his reverence had brought, was donned by Teddy. 'Twas calculated they jumped thirteen pikes that night, afore they reached to Plymouth, wi' a brace of horses that must have gone seventy miles since the morn. Dicky always did have blood horses ; but even so 'twas a great feat. It was also discovered they'd knocked up an inn on the edge of Dartmoor, and baited their beasts, and made a big meal and paid fancy money for it at two in the morning. Then they must have gone straight to Plymouth ; and the steeds turned up in the hands of a dealer who knew their value and bought 'em cheap. The Reverend Steel and Teddy had been seen at the Barbican and elsewhere ; and then they vanished from the eyes of the nation, and everybody knowed very well without any telling that they'd slipped England and got off—most like in some small French trader. No doubt they left their country for their country's good, and they never come back no more—not to stop ; and it was said that, though she knew she wouldn't set eyes on the man again, his mother took it in her usual even way and was content to think the font had done its holy duty and saved his life.

As for Jenifer, there's an instinct in this country that will even forgive unlawful deeds, if they have a flavour of good sport and a spice of fun to 'em. In fact, many said she did ought to be richly rewarded for saving her brother's neck ; and a few bloods sent round the hat for her after, and fetched her in a tidy bit of money. 'Twas thought she'd get a year in clink at least ; but she didn't. They cross-examined her very close, but couldn't get nothing out of her ; and then they let her go and watched her, like a kestrel watches a lizard ; for they guessed she'd give it away presently.

And a Bow Street runner came down to Lower Town for a bit and put up at " The Seven Stars " and pretended he

was a hunting gentleman ; but everybody saw through him clear enough and he gleaned nought, for Jenifer was quite a reformed character then and no girl behaved better or looked sharper after her father's kine and his butter and cheese.

Not for a year did anything happen and the case was very near forgot, and a new clergyman came to the church. Then, like a night hawk, Jenifer was away, and her parents knew nothing ; but they guessed a lot. In their opinion there was somebody come for her by night, and they little doubted that the man was her sweetheart.

And they went farther and reckoned that by the mysterious will of God, Dicky had slipped over from France to Plymouth on the quiet and taken Jenifer back the same way. Nothing was done to the old people about it ; though, after that, 'twas noticed that Farmer Snow had business to Plymouth sometimes ; and our sexton's great-grandmother always ended the tale the same way, by saying that her sister, Jane Snow, told her a year later she had got a grandson.

" And I wish to God," she used to say, " that the boy could be baptised in our font, for the son of Dicky Steel and my Jenifer may come to need it."

When his tale was done, Tom Bewes asked Jerry Stockman a question.

" And did the Governor of Exeter prison lose his job ? " he said.

But Jerry minded he didn't.

" No," he answered. " He was laughed at a lot, which must have been gall to a fine, old soldier like him, but they loved a joke better at Headquarters in them days than what they do now, and they let him bide. And I never heard as no other gaol bird took wing in his time."

"HEY DIDDLE DIDDLE, THE CAT . . ."

"HEY DIDDLE DIDDLE, THE CAT . . ."

WHEN you be done larning, you might so well stop living, and for my part, though I'm sixty-five, I thank God as I can still gather useful knowledge when it comes my way.

For example, but four year ago, I had my eyes opened about a matter on which I'd thought wrong for more than half a century. I never could understand man or woman who loved a beast ; and when I see an old maid dote on her cat, or an old bachelor share the best off his own plate with his dog, I scorned 'em. And when the creatures came to a bad end, as pets so often will, and their owners weren't above shedding a tear for 'em, I said, in my ignorance, they did ought to be ashamed, and called 'em weak-minded zanies to let a dumb animal reign over 'em in such a fashion. But I don't put on no airs and graces now when I see anybody fretting for a sick or dead creature ; because I be in the same boat myself.

As a widow man and pretty well-to-do, I be one of them that count at Ponsworthy, and have always tried to keep up the dignity of the village and be a good neighbour and help on the welfare of us all in my small way. And being addicted to childer, though never blessed or cursed with none, I made friends with the young things and stood well in their opinion.

So it came about that, as I minded their birthdays pretty often, a sharp little maid axed me when mine might be ; and I told her, doubting not that she'd forget again. Daisy Bird she was called, the youngest daughter of my particular friend, Martin Bird, of the all-sorts shop.

Well, Daisy remembered, and on my birthday she brought me a kitten just old enough to leave his mother. 'Twas a cat of a well-known mother, but the father was wrapped in mystery, as fathers too often are. The kitling weren't

nothing to praise, nor yet to blame—just a very every day young cat, with a piebald face and a bit of yellow and black dabbed about over a white ground. His eyes were doubtful and Daisy promised me as they'd turn a nice green when he'd growed a bit, same as his mother's ; and if you'd looked my gift-cat in the mouth, you'd have seen 'twas pink as a rose, with just the beginning of small, pearly teeth coming. No tail to name ; but there again Daisy came to the rescue and solemnly vowed that he had the promise of a very fine tail, if I'd only be patient about it.

'Twas to be called " Sunny Jim," and she much hoped I'd take to it and be a kind friend to it ; and if I did not, it had got to be drowned.

I paused at that, for I had meant to beg Daisy to carry it home and let me take the kind will for the deed. But when I see the little thing so trustful and so wishful to please, and so well satisfied with me from the first ; and when I understood it was a choice between life along with me and death in the river, I hesitated.

Daisy picked him up and put him in my hand; and if he'd showed any sauce, or turned against me, it would have been " good-bye." But he knew 'twas touch and go ; and whenever does a cat do a thing that makes against its own prosperity ? He looked up in my face and purred, with the little gruff purr as young cats have, and rubbed his small carcass against my waistcoat, as if he'd found the very person he was wanting. So there it stood ; I kept him, and let him have his run and his fill, and watched him grow into a very ugly cat in other eyes, but not ugly to me—never to me.

I always say that it's a beautiful thing to see the contentment of animals. No doubt it only happens because they've got no wits and no power to compare their lot with any other ; but whatever it be—horse or donkey, dog or cat, only let him know he's welcome and have got a man or woman friend, and he'll cleave to the lowliest lot and be just so cheerful and good-hearted and faithful along with a tinker as a king. They'll fit in, make themselves part of the home, feel 'tis the one place in the world that matters, however poor and humble, and go about the troublesome business of being alive, with such pluck and patience and

good appetite that they be often a lesson to us grumbling, grizzling humans.

No dog or cat will ever look on the dark side of things. Nature have made 'em hopeful. They be quick to scent pleasure, and though there's a good and bad among 'em and some more easily cast down than others, they be prone to welcome life and give of their best in exchange for small mercies.

My Sunny Jim was a very well-named cat. He had what you might call a reasonable mind, and if he'd lacked the many virtues that came out in him, still I'd have been bound in common justice to rate him as a very worthy chap—along of his amazing affection for me. He seemed to know from the first as I had no use for domestic animals, and he said to himself: " Then I'll break you in and make you properly mad about me and conquer your hard heart."

He went about it very cunning, too. He knew I was a terrible clean old man and liked my house to be so spick and span as myself; and so he began by showing me what cleanliness really was; and a more fussy cat from his youth up I have never met. His father must have been a gentleman for sartain. You felt the cat had good blood in him, he was so nice. Never a hair out of place you might say, and he'd lick himself and wash his chops sometimes after a sup and bite till I'd shout at him to let be. Mud was his abomination, and if he come in with a speck on his pads, he'd bite and fidget, as if he was pulling off a pair of gloves; and he never thanked me more grateful nor purred louder than when I gave him his brush and comb. But, to tell truth, I humoured him in that matter, and finding what a godsend it was to him to have a rub from time to time, I met him there and kept an old brush a' purpose.

At six months I knew he'd got me, and I was a lot too fond of the cat; and on his birthday, which Daisy Bird remembered, us gave Sunny Jim a party, and Daisy and half a score of childer agreed to come. 'Twas a great success. Us provided him with three sardines and a drop of cream, and long after the party was over and the childer gone, he sat polishing up. Then, when he felt perfection inside and out, he just give a sigh of satisfaction and tucked in his paws and sat quite silent thinking over the day's fine doings.

As for mice, he was a very fine performer, but my house never had no mice in it as he soon found, so he went down three doors to Mrs. Wilkinson's, where there were scores of dozens, and he never drawed a blank there. Not that he'd often eat a mouse ; but he was a mighty hunter of 'em —a proper mouse-tiger, you might say—though not much a one for birds. He seldom went afield and never laid a paw to fur or feathers, like many a hard-bitten poacher of a cat, as makes a shameful end soon or late on gamekeeper's gallows.

He slept along with me, at my bed-foot, and I'd trained him to come in for his supper an hour or so after dark. But he liked the evening hour and the moth time. Then he'd sit on the party wall and take the air, or join in a cat chorus perhaps, but all like a gentleman ; and he never went too far, or done anything to be ashamed of. A wife or two he may have had, but all well within honour ; and he wouldn't fight nor nothing like that, for the good reason that he weighed about five pounds heavier than any cat at Ponsworthy, and no other tom in his right senses would have took him on for a moment.

He supped with me, and by ten o'clock we was both to bed. Then when he was stretched at my feet and the candle out, I'd bid him say his prayers, and he'd purr gentle and steady ; and for a good few years the last sound I have heard, as I closed my eyes, was Sunny Jim saying his prayers.

Mrs. Wilkinson warned me, strangely enough, just a week afore the crash came.

" You be putting that tortoiseshell tom afore your God, Peter Blount," she said to me, " and 'tis terrible dangerous, for the Almighty's jealous as the grave, and you may get a nasty awakener."

A proper prophet the woman was, for seven nights later, just afore the hour when the cat was due—a moony night in autumn, bright and peaceful, with the owls calling each other in Western Wood—I heard a harsh, sharp sound which I knowed for a heavy air-gun ; and not liking it none too well at that late hour, I went in my garden instanter to call Sunny Jim.

The back side of my house gave on waste land that ran up to furze brakes, and I was going to give a look over the

wall and see who it might be prowling round, when my cat crawled up to me on three legs. I picked him up and took him in to the lamp ; and then I found as he'd got his shoulder all smashed by a bullet.

I kept my head and ministered to the poor soul, and he fixed his eyes upon me and seemed to ask if it was to be a fatal matter. For a time I thought he was sinking, for he lay cruel still with his eyes shut, breathing hard ; but then, seeing he weren't in no immediate danger of death, I offered him water, which he lapped, and after that I picked him up so tender as I might, put him in a big vegetable basket, with a bit of blanket in the bottom, and carried him over to see Billy Blades.

Billy weren't a man I liked, being a doubtful customer in many ways, and said to have shortened his wife's life by unkindness ; but he was a very clever vet., and properly renowned for his knowledge of four-footed creatures. He was a great dog-fancier without a doubt, and though 'twas whispered he fancied other people's dogs a thought too often, yet the skill was there ; so I took Sunny Jim to see the man, and he was home by good luck and gave me all his attention. The cat knew perfectly well what his doctor was up to, and behaved like a Christian under the search.

"His shoulder blade be smashed to pieces," said Billy, "and if the ball had took him an inch lower, it would have gone through the creature and slain him. The man who done this made a bad shot, I reckon, and when he found he'd only winged the cat, he ran for it, knowing the creature would have strength to get home and give the show away."

"But why should any mortal man want for to kill my cat ? " I asked.

"For his skin," explained Billy Blades. "Cat and coney be worth money nowadays. A skin like this here will die black and be worth fifteen shillings, or a pound, to any man ; and that's why a good few cats have failed to come home lately. But I bain't going to say he won't live. I think he may. He's in good health and in his prime by the look of him, and he's got a patient sort of nature. You see how he bears up. If all goes well and there's no fatal poison in the wound, he'll very likely make a good recovery. Us can't tell yet ; but if, as may happen,

the wound gets ugly in a few days, then I'll give him a whiff of chloroform and see into the evil and find if the bullet's there."

"I can take hope then?" I asked.

"You can," he said, "but not too much. He's hard hit."

So all was dreadful suspense, and nought could be done for a time till the extent of the danger showed.

I took Sunny Jim home, and, to my great thanksgiving, he ate a bit of raw mutton, as I cut off a leg and minced for him. Not much, but enough to keep up his strength; and he got a little sleep also off and on, though I did not; and in the morning, I carried him down, and he just lay, patient and resigned, on his little mat by the kitchen fire, while I swallowed my breakfast.

But my rage knew no bounds, and if I could have catched the anointed devil as done it, I'd have choked his breath out of him between my hands. I never did feel so properly hard to any fellow-creature before; and to this day when I see the vision of thicky cat crawling home on three legs, with the moonlight on his poor, terrified eyes, I feel a thrill of hate and passion.

Next morning it was round the village like a flame of fire that Sunny Jim had been shot and might die of it, and a proper rally of neighbours—women, children, and men—streamed along to see him and say how cruel vexed they was on my account, and to hope that Sunny Jim might be spared. 'Twas the general opinion that no neighbour could have sunk to such a crime, for none was known to bear me a grudge, nor yet him.

Billy Blades came morning and evening to view the patient. And then he gave me a ray of hope, for, in a week, he believed the wound was clean and wouldn't get no worse. In fact, it began to heal very nice outside, and now the danger was whether Sunny Jim's sinews would join up too, or whether they would not. And much depended upon that. He couldn't put his paw down yet, of course, but Job never beat him for patience. He didn't like me out of his sight, however, and wouldn't let down his victuals for anybody but me.

And then in my wrath I issued an advertisement, for I was death on bringing the sinner to justice and felt

if a man had done the crime he must be had up and disgraced afore the magistrates; while if it was only a wicked, hard-hearted boy, then the least they could do to him, for his own salvation and my satisfaction, would be a damned good hiding.

And I wrote with my own hand six advertisements offering £5 reward for the name of the man, or boy, as had shot my famous cat. One I stuck on my front gate, one on the guide post at the cross roads outside Ponsworthy, one in Martin Bird's shop window, one in the post office, one by the upping-stock, outside "The Green Man" public house, and the other in the bar of the same.

People marvelled at the sight of such big money, and they said, behind my back, as I must be a millionaire, or else going weak in my head; but it was a fortnight afore any response reached me, and then I had the surprise of my life on hearing the sinner's name.

I learnt it of a Friday, when Billy Blades dropped in for a look at Sunny Jim, and he said he was very pleased indeed with the cat's progress and now felt it was safe to assure me he'd make a recovery and was out of danger.

"The ligaments be joined up beautiful," said Billy, "and the bone have growed together. You see how he can use his leg and trust it again; and he could trust it more than he do, only he's nervous yet. But, though he may go a thought lame for life, it will be nothing to interfere with his pleasure. And in time even the lameness may wear off altogether, when the muscles and sinews get used to the change."

Then I thanked Blades with all my heart and shook his hand and told him I thought he was a very clever man and must send in his account.

"And now 'tis all over," he said, "I'll tell you another thing about this here cat, and that's the name of the party as tried to shoot him and failed."

"You know!" I cried out. "Then I thank Providence, Billy; and never shall I part from a five-pound note with better will."

"No you won't," he answered. "You'll hate to part, Peter; but life's life and cats are cats, and a fiver is a fiver, so just you keep your nerve and take it as it comes. I shot your cat. I was poking about in the furzes with a new

air-gun, and seeing the beggar airing himself, I thought a quid for his skin was worth while, me being harder up than usual. So I fired to drop him, but he moved and so was saved alive. Then he was gone like a streak; and so was I, because I knowed you'd fetch him along to me so soon as you could, if he weren't done for. But I'm right down glad to have saved him and be nearly so fond of the chap now as you are yourself."

"You God-forgotten villain!" I cried to the wretch, trembling white with rage.

"I know," he answered. "That's all right, and you can lay it on so thick as you please and cuss till you're winded. But you understand the situation, don't you? You summons me, and I get a dressing down and a caution and a fine. And the fine will be ten shillings and sixpence; and time don't stand still and the matter will soon be forgot; and I get your five pounds."

"Hookem snivey beast!" I said to him. "That ban't all, I promise you! My five pound you may have; but I'll ruin your business and set every honest man and woman against you, and hound you out of Ponsworthy. By God's light I will!"

He laughed his hateful, coarse laugh, and his sharp nose grew sharper than ever.

"You do your worstest and welcome, Peter Blount," he said. "I ban't much afraid. There ain't no other vet. within ten miles that I know about, and the farmers don't care how wicked a man may be, so long as he knows how to cure their things. So you give me my fiver, and then have me up for trying to shoot your cat. And always remember that I'm terrible glad I missed his vitals—though how I failed I can't guess, for 'twas bright moonlight and I was as sober as I am now."

I blazed up at that and ordered him out of my house, and he went; and I bided awake three parts of the night thinking on the awful ways of human nature and the hateful surprises that may be hid in your next-door neighbour and familiar friend. In fact I cussed Billy to hell and raged against him something furious; and first thing next morning I went up to Martin Bird and catched him taking down his shutters, and told him the monstrous tale.

It interested him a lot, and he seemed to think it funny in a way, though for my part I didn't see nothing funny to it.

"To give the traitor as shot Sunny Jim four pound ten shilling for his trouble, be a bit of a joke sure enough," said Martin Bird. "Of course, you'll have the satisfaction of getting him up afore the Justices and turning public opinion against him; but after all, as he very truly said, a cat's only a cat—masterpiece though your cat is known to be—and the law must hold an even balance between man and man; and when you think of the dark crimes that human nature will do at a pinch, the law have to keep a bit up its sleeve for the murderers and such like. And so, no doubt, ten and six for a cat be about the justice of it."

"I don't want no vengeance like that," I told Martin. "We all know vengeance be the Lord's; and to speak plain, I'm a lot more set now on keeping my five-pound note than on having that beastly toad afore the beaks. It ain't the money, but the shame; for he'll have the laugh against me to my dying day if he gets the cash."

"He will," admitted Martin. "Billy Blades is an artful item best of times, and it would hit him much harder to withhold your money than have him up."

"But how can it be done in honesty?" I asked. "There it is in plain black and white. I offer five pounds to know who shot my cat; and he told me."

Martin Bird said it was a very pretty problem, but he didn't give up all hope of solving it. He was a clever man, as them with a barrow-load of children must be, if they want to keep their young and themselves out of the workhouse, and he promised me he'd look in during the evening if any light struck upon the subject.

"Anyway, 'tis Saturday, and you can well leave his claim unsettled till you decide whether to summon him," said Bird to me.

So I went home to Sunny Jim, and couldn't help feeling that anything less than the law against Billy would be treachery to my cat. And yet again, there was no doubt that Billy had been wondrous clever with the animal, and so healed his shoulder that he was to have the blessing of his leg. For what be the fulness of life to a cat on three legs? Billy had, in fact, made good his own evil work in a

manner of speaking, and I was bound to admit that, once the cat was in his hands, he might have finished the murder, and I shouldn't have been none the wiser.

I couldn't see my duty all day, and the more I thought on Billy Blades the more I detested him, for he'd played a devilish part, and not been ashamed to confess it for blood money. So, when Martin strolled in, after he'd shut up his shop, and asked for a spot of whisky, I weren't no forwarder than in the morn. But, if anything, I hated worse than ever the thought of handing my five pounds to the assassin.

Martin stroked Sunny Jim for a bit and watched him walk, and said that by the look of it he was making a very brave recovery.

" The bone be joined up and the sinews going on fine," I told Bird, " and I shall leave him to nature now, for I won't have that cat-murderer in my house no more."

" Well," answered Martin, " I believe I see the way out for you. It come to me, like the Light to Paul, while I was cutting off a pound of bacon. If you want to diddle Billy Blades, it can be done, and you've only got to say the word."

" I do," I said. " I never felt to want nothing so much."

" Right," he answered. " Say no more, Peter, but just go about your business and leave the rest to me."

'Twas a very puzzling direction, and I asked Martin to speak a thought plainer ; but he refused.

" See what happens o' Monday morning," was all he would answer. And so, full of wonder and quite in the dark, I had to leave it at that.

Then Bird went his way after a lot of whisky, but he explained that I needn't grudge it, because he was going to take a tidy bit of trouble on my account. And when he was gone, me and Sunny Jim toddled off to bed. He couldn't quite get upstairs yet, so I had to carry him ; and I reckoned that the poor hero had lost about three of his nine lives by this fearful adventure.

Nought happened Sunday, though, as I found afterwards, Martin had been so busy as a bee on my account ; and when Monday came, afore I'd done my breakfast, and while the cat was washing his face after his, the mystery began to unfold. But when I say " washing his face " I must tell

you that Sunny Jim could only polish up one side as yet, for his right front paw couldn't work to perfection so far; and 'twas among his greatest griefs, while he was recovering, that the right side of his head and his right whisker and right ear had to go untended. I done what I could, but nought to satisfy him.

Then who should come in but Andy White, the water-keeper, a very knowledgeable man with the rare gift to see in the dark.

"Well, White," I axed, "and what might you want?"

"Five pounds," he said. "I know who 'twas tried to slay your cat."

I leapt out of my chair as if I was sitting on fire.

"Guy Fawkes and angels!" I cried. "D'you tell me you done it, Andy?"

"Me done it!" he said. "No, Peter Blount, I ban't a cat shooter as ever I heard tell about. And I'm sorry you think I'd so demean myself. 'Twas Neddy Tutt, that young rip from Falcon Farm. He's got an air-gun and the deed was his."

Well, for the life of me I couldn't see even yet what was afoot, and after Andy had said he'd be round with proofs for his money a bit later, and had gone to work, I sat marvelling at his news.

And then, just as Mrs. Bassett come in to tidy up for me and see after one thing and another, which she performed regular for half-a-crown a week, who should knock at the door but Willie Stockman, the shoesmith.

"Hullo, Willie, and what can I do for you?" I asked the young man. He was rather a favourite of mine, for he had a kind heart and kept his widowed mother.

"Ban't what you can do for me, master, but what I can do for you," he answered. "Come in the garden and I'll tell you something you be wishful to know."

So I stepped out, and Sunny Jim, he stepped out with me. You'd have thought the blessed cat was in the know, for he sat and looked at Willie without winking while he spoke.

"'Tis no less a job than the business of this poor creature," said Stockman. "I happened to be going home in the moonlight with my young woman, and just as us came through the furze brakes up over, I marked a chap with a

gun. He lifted it and let fly, and then he was sloking off, but he came full upon us, Peter, and gave us 'Good night.' And 'twas that poaching rascal, Timothy Bamsey, from Lower Town. So now you know what you want to know. And I may say your five pounds be going to push on our wedding. There's no hurry, however, till you've got the proofs of the crime."

Of course, I thanked him very grateful; and when he was gone I beginned slow and sure to see the terrible cunning of Martin Bird. In fact, I'd never have given the man credit for such amazing stratagems; and even that weren't all, for an hour later, as I was digging a few potatoes in the sun, and the cat was practising his game leg gentle, and seeing if he could clean his claws on the stem of my lilac bush according to his daily use, if Timothy Bamsey himself didn't heave up the road! A hugeous young man—six foot three inches of wickedness, by all accounts. I knew him by sight, no more, and I also knew he'd only escaped clink by the skin of his teeth after a row over the pheasants down to Squire Mannering's preserves. But there he was, and he stopped at the gate and asked in a big voice if I could tell him where I lived.

"Do'e know the man round about here what had his cat shot long ago?" says Timothy Bamsey to me, and I left my fork sticking in the ground and went down to him.

"I'm the man," I said, "and what about it?" For I felt sure he was come to own the felony and claim the fiver, same as Billy Blades had done. I felt fierce, I admit, for I was getting in a miz-maze along of all this plotting. I'd almost forgot Billy, and for the moment I felt as if I stood face to face with the real, living villain at last.

But he soon undeceived me.

"Well, I know who shot your cat, master. By chance I was going home along behind these here houses on the night, and just as I came down, I see a man in the moonlight lift a gun and fire—an air-gun it was, for there weren't no explosion, but just a whizz and a jolt, like what air-guns make. Then he runned forward to take up his prey; but he found nought. He cussed something terrible, and was just making off, when he very near ran into me and tried to hide his face. But I see him so plain as I see you this minute."

"And who was the man, Timothy Bamsey?" I asked, so stern as I could.

"Willie Stockman, the shoesmith," he answered. "There ain't no manner of doubt about it, I assure you. And I'll have my fiver, if it's all one, Mr. Blount."

Well, my head was spinning now till I thought it would roll off in the road.

"Us'll talk about this another time," I said to the man. "There's a mystery here, and I must seek my friends afore I do ought in such a dark matter. I'm very much obliged to you, and you'll hear of me again presently; but I don't part with no five-pound notes for the minute, for it begins to look as if I should have to summon half the parish afore I get to the bitter truth."

"I've told 'e the truth," he says, "and you owe me five pounds."

"I may, or I may not; but be sure justice shall be done," I said. And with that he went off, leaving me in a proper confusion of brain till the evening come. Then Martin Bird dropped in to hear the result of his work. And when he did hear it he was terrible pleased.

"Now," he said, "you stand in a firm position, for here be a cloud of witnesses, Peter, and one man's word is as good as another's, and better for that matter. Because everybody knows Billy Blades is a liar, and nobody would take his word against t'others. So all you need to say is that you don't know who the deuce to believe among 'em, which is true. And then you keep your money in your pocket!"

"A masterpiece of politics, Martin!" I said. "And gratefully I thank you for it, but while Sunny Jim's living, it's always in the power of a wicked man to have the last word and lay him out. Don't you forget that."

"I haven't," answered Bird, who fairly staggered me with his wondrous brain power. "I haven't overlooked the future, and what I advise you to do be this, Peter: Ax the whole crew of 'em in to supper one night, and give 'em a tidy feed and a bit of baccy to each, and a bottle of whisky also. Do 'em a treat; then they'll all be your friends for life."

"And Blades also?" I asked.

"Certainly Blades. He's the one that matters most. 'Cause we know he done it in reality. Then, when they be

got together and their bellies filled and their pipes drawing suent and their glasses topped up, you can tell 'em, amiable like, that they be a pack of bare-faced liars, and you find such a lot of men shot your cat that you ain't going to make no distinctions, but trust to the goodwill and gentlemanly feeling of 'em all never to do it no more. It will run you in a pound or so, but you're a snug man and won't be none the worse.

"You've took the lead in this matter," I said, "and I'll go through with it according as you direct. All I ask is that you come to the feed with the rest."

Which Martin Bird did do; and, God's my Judge, I never want to spend a pleasanter evening. They all obeyed my invite; and they all laughed fit to die when I told 'em they was a set of low-down, lying blackguards; and Billy Blades had to be seen home after, for he was blind afore the finish, singing shameful songs, as be long gone out of print, thank the watching Lord.

Sunny Jim, he much enjoyed his evening, also, and got nothing but kind words. And rabbit pie being very near his favourite food, he done himself so well as any of us. But the merriment tired him, and you can't blame the dear chap for not seeing the joke quite so clear as Billy and Timothy and Martin and Andy and Neddy and Willie saw it.

'Twas a good night, however, and me and Sunny Jim felt very glad to get to bed when the boys had gone.

And this I can say: no hand was ever lifted to my cat again. He walked on his way rejoicing, and though I ban't going to pretend he was ever quite the same light-hearted, high-spirited party as of old, yet his higher qualities still shine out of him; and he's all the world to me.

Billy Blades was round only a night ago, and he thought as Sunny Jim ought to live a good five year yet. So I be contented in my mind about him; and while there's a purr left in him, I shall be his very willing servant and faithful friend.

But never again! Life be a cloudy and difficult business enough at best without mixing yourself up with the dumb things and letting a creature without a soul into your heart. I won't love nought on four feet no more. They get too terrible a grip upon your vitals—specially if you're a lonely old blid, without much else to set store by, same as me.

THE COFFIN STONE

THE COFFIN STONE

We were telling one evening in the bar of "The Dog and Gun" about the changes life had brought, and the way that old manners and customs had died out of the land and new ones taken their places. And some of the old chaps held for the old paths, while the younger men, though not best pleased with things as they were, yet reckoned we was heading to better times, and felt glad they hadn't lived in the bygone, harsh days when manners were rough and customs rougher.

There's no doubt the rising generation takes its pleasure a bit differently from its grandfather's; and Dick Merry, the old foxhunter, told a tale which went to show how things happened a hundred years ago that couldn't well happen now. Not that human nature changes, for 'tis a human tale enough; but we look at life through the eyes of education, and we keep ourselves better in hand, and things that men did then, all in the day's work and nothing said, would shock the people if they happened now and get in the newspapers and be thought very savage and ill-convenient.

Dick had the tale from his mother not long afore she died. She was reading a lot of old letters she treasured, and some ancient writing brought the story home to her memory, else very like it would have been dead and forgot out of mind when she passed. She was up eighty-eight when she died and joined her husband at Widecombe churchyard; and he was but twenty-seven when he dropped; and the gravestone showed a difference of sixty-six years between his end and hers. For Mrs. Merry never took another, but lived to see her boy and girl far on the way to being old folk themselves.

There was a publican to Ponsworthy a hundred years ago,

and he kept " The Dog and Gun " in them days and lived a very good, long life, with a prosperous middle-age built up on a stormy past ; for Abraham Chaffe had been a prize-fighter in his youth and the champion of the West Country. He'd fought some of the very best also and given a good account of himself in London against more than one of the great heavyweights of those times. Fights were fights then—with the bare knuckles and wrestling thrown in ; and the money that goes to the game nowadays—for twenty rounds with gloves and no wrestling for the fall—would make the old pugs turn in their graves. The things they did for small money might astonish this generation, when a couple of second-class " bantams " won't look at each other for ten times the stuff that would have satisfied the champions of old.

But Abe Chaffe, " The Devonshire Dumpling," as he was called, made what was a snug fortune for a fighter in his day, and when he got past his prime and in sight of eight-and-thirty, he went out of the game and came home to his folk at Ponsworthy and counted to enjoy his future life in peace.

He was a huge chap, but his business hadn't done no worse than smash his great, kind face flat and give him a " cauliflower " ear. He put on fat after forty, and by the time he was fifty weighed twenty stone and could pick up his wife and dance her like a baby, though she weren't a chicken by any means. He took life easy, and money came along, for he was very popular, and his house drew a lot of people beside the folk. Gentlemen came up for the fishing, and he built on a good few rooms in course of time.

Chaffe always had his eyes open for a scrap, too, and many a little mill was fought round about Ponsworthy when he reigned. He believed in the manly art, and when he chanced upon private quarrels, over a maiden or what not, he'd always try to bring the men together for a clash in a twenty-four foot ring, if they was about equal and promised a fair fight.

He'd got but one child—a grand little chap—and when at twelve year old, he was struck by a mill wheel and flung into the mill race and drowned, people said in secret that the poor lad was took from the evil to come ; for his father said he meant him to be a fighter and Champion of England

some day. Chaffe and his missus took on grievous after that and suffered a great deal, and Hetty Chaffe was never the same woman again ; but Abraham got over it in a few years' time and went his sporting way.

And then, in his old age there came a great and curious wish into his mind, and he grew terrible anxious to see a fight between his nephew, William Merry, and a proper young fellow by the name of Andrew Cleave. Andrew and William were cousins, both well thought on, both only an inch short of six foot high, and both so strong as lions. And the master of " The Dog and Gun " felt that they'd make a beautiful well-matched pair in the ring, and went so far as to say he'd put up fifty pounds if they'd go into training and try which was better man in the old-fashioned way.

As for Andrew Cleave, who loved the game and had fought a battle or two and come out top, he was all for the scrap, and felt, if it came off, the fifty pounds was in his pocket, because he reckoned himself the better man ; but much to the disappointment of the people Will Merry didn't see his way. He'd also had a mill or two in his 'teens and done very clever, though he lacked the mind of a prize-fighter ; but now, at three-and-twenty, he didn't want to go into the game serious. He was a woodman drawing good money and hopeful to be wed. For he was courting a very fine girl, whose opinions were against Will risking his good looks even for such a prize. Nobody in fairness could accuse Merry of the white feather, because he'd shown himself a brave enough man ; but old Abe, whose heart was set on the match, took the refusal in bad part and rated his nephew rather harsh in the public bar ; while as for Andrew Cleave, he hated the idea of losing what he thought would be easy money, and he certainly tried all he knew to ruffle Merry and bring him to the scratch. Men didn't pick their words very nice in them days and rough things were said ; but Will, who was a very self-contained chap, knew that he was right, especially when Milly, the girl he was after, expressed her opinion against it.

Now Milly Mansell, though a fine creature, was a bit given to moods and whims, as pretty women will be, and though so good as promised, she hadn't said the word, but kept Will hanging in her larder, for the moment, with one or two

other young men. Still, he felt sure she'd made up her mind, and went his way and waited her will, being helped by a patient nature so to do.

The fight was off seemingly, for Will made it clear enough that nothing would change him ; and yet, such are the surprises of human nature, within six months of that time the men met, and old Abe was at the ring-side after all. A strange and creepy thing altogether, and though the ancient prize-fighter was there, never a word he spoke and never an eye he winked, nor yet stood umpire, nor yet lent a hand with either of the men. You'd say 'twas beyond mortal power to have kept so still at such a wonderful battle as that turned out to be ; but Abe done it ; and, what's more, no man ever heard him say one word upon the subject after the scrap was ended and the best man had won.

It happened in this way. Old Chaffe, when his nephew vowed once and for all he wouldn't fight Andrew, answered oath for oath, and swore that when he dropped and his will came to be read his nephew would repent it. Then the matter fell out of conversation and was forgot. But mighty soon it rose again ; for next thing was that Abraham, down at Dartmeet after woodcock with a neighbour sportsman, came to his fatal catastrophe, him being seventy-two years old at the time. He slipped in the river and fell against a stone under the water, and the huge weight of him was such that he smashed his thigh and done himself other injuries within. The man with him could no more have lifted Abe than he could have moved Eagle Tor, so he sped up the valley to Dartmeet and gave the alarm, and collected a few chaps and got back to poor Chaffe, who was lying meantime like a stricken elephant, half in the river and half out.

They heaved him ashore and fixed up a few poles and put their coats on 'em, and with terrible difficulties fetched the man up to Caunter's cottage at Dartmeet. And then they got a lot of spirits into him, which was a very mistaken thing to do ; and when the doctor came Abe was in a fearful state along of his innards ; and saw-bones looked so black as night and issued his orders and said he'd be back along early next morning.

Mrs. Chaffe had come down, of course, when she heard of

the disaster; but neither she nor anybody could save the old boy, and next morning doctor had to break it to him that he was going home and couldn't hope for more than a few days of life. Abe took it in the spirit that had made him champion of the West Country, only he said he was cruel sorry to go and terrible put about to have given the people such a lot of trouble. And he axed doctor to send lawyer from Ashburton when he got home. And doctor did so.

Then Abraham made his will, and Jack Caunter and his son, Joe, witnessed to it; and Mrs. Chaffe heard it and raised no objections, though there might have been one hid in her heart. Abe took farewell of his friends, and a proper rally of neighbours went down to Dartmeet from all round about to bid him good-bye; and then he died, and his wife and his sister and his nephew, Will Merry, was at his bedside when he did so.

And Jack Caunter, who was a very practical man, wondered how the mischief they'd ever get the mighty chap to his tomb at Widecombe, for once in his coffin there'd be a hugeous dead weight for the bearers; and to fetch Abraham up Dartmeet Hill would have meant hard work for horses, let alone the men who'd be called to do it. For, of course, it had to be a walking funeral according to custom, and there was the well-known Coffin Stone halfway up the hill, where hundreds of corpses of dead and gone folk had lain, while the living rested for a bit and let down a drop of cider or spirits.

The Coffin Stone is a great, natural slab of granite in the green sward off the road at the shoulder of the hill. It lies on a flat space, and there be holy crosses scratched upon it to mark its ancient purpose. And Caunter said that if once they got so far, the back of the job would be broke; but he advised for a rally of the strongest men. And so it was. Ten of the best came to the task, and they made good way, for 'twas a cold January morning and snow about. The funeral moved before nine of the clock, and they was only males there, for Mrs. Chaffe and Abe's sister and the other women were going to meet the corpse at the graveside.

And then the amazing thing fell out, and when Will Merry, Andrew Cleave, and the eight other chaps as bore the dead in his shining oak case were resting at the Coffin

Stone, Joe Caunter, Jack's son, and a score of neighbours stood by 'em, and Joe, who was full of it and had got it from his father, axed 'em if they knew about the will.

None did, and Jack Caunter, who had heard about the matter from Abe himself, told 'em of a wondrous provision under the old man's testament. They called to Will Merry then, for he'd strolled away from the rest and was sitting on a stone apart. He'd got his own troubles at the moment, because Milly Mansell and him had fallen out, and she'd turned her passing attention to another man. In truth it looked to Merry much as though all was up, his two years of courting wasted and his love crossed. So he was in a cold mood and didn't care overmuch what became of him just then. But t'others called him and told him about the wonderful curious manner he was down in his uncle's will. He doubted it a lot, because since his refusal to fight Andrew the old man had cared nought for him; but Jack Caunter swore to the truth, and true it was in a manner of speaking. You see, the ruling passion kept strong in old Abe to the end, and Abe had it down in his will that he'd left five hundred pounds to the winner of a stand-up fight with bare knuckles under Queensberry rules between his nephew, Will Merry, and Andrew Cleave; and that's what Will now heard. Of course Andrew was mad with joy, for he said that no honest man had any right to stand between him and a fortune like that; but few imagined that Will would go back on his determination of the past. All eyes were on him, and what went through his mind no man could tell; but it didn't take him long to decide, and to their great astonishment that quiet and patient man made answer in most unexpected fashion.

"So be it," he said. "Dead men shan't be denied. I'll fight you, Andrew; but on one condition only. It's got to be now or never. I'll fight you here this minute, if you'm game, or else I won't fight you at all. I won't cool on it, and if you can't fight me now, God's my judge there won't be no fight."

They stood aghast—all but Andrew—and the elder men reminded Will what was the matter in hand; but he took a sort of grim pleasure in that.

"'Twas his dying thought seemingly," said Will, "so

us will fight it out here, while he lies alongside the ring on Coffin Stone ; and I hope he ban't too far off to get news of the winner."

Andrew would have liked a month to make ready, but he weren't feared of the issue anyway, and afore you could look round they was agreed. And young Joe Caunter ran up to the top of the hill, where doctor in his trap was to meet the procession, and there he bided, cussing 'em for being so slow. But when he heard the news, sport that he was, he drove down to umpire the bout, and Jack Caunter and another went home for towels and a couple of pails and a sponge or two, if he could find 'em, and a rope for the ring and stakes and a beetle to drive 'em home.

Both men wore under-pants of wool, and in ten minutes they had taken off their funeral black, along with their shirts, and stood up bare to the mark, and ready for each other. Very fine they looked, too, by all accounts, with Andrew a bit the thicker in the barrel and Will finer built but well-ribbed up ; and if he was thinner in the forearm, he was a shade longer ; and it looked as if he'd be quicker in his footwork, though Andrew Cleave had mighty thighs and calves, which promised that when they wrestled for the fall he'd be likely to account for Will most times.

Then they made the ring, and doctor gave 'em a word or two, and the Caunters, father and son, were in Andrew's corner, while a man by name of Josiah Clemo and his son-in-law, Tom White, looked after Will.

'Twas half after nine o'clock, and the snow still offering out of the north, when the umpire called time and they shook hands and began to fight.

So properly well matched were they, both for strength and cleverness, that Solomon's self couldn't have told which was going to come out top, and there's no doubt the issue turned not on their bodies so much as on their minds. For Andrew was just a common fashion of chap with no great brain power, but the fighting nature, and he meant taking no chances, being out to win by all the fair tricks of the game he knew ; while Will Merry had a larger brain, but a gentler character, in fact nothing but his own bitter feelings that morning, and the thought of the woman lost really screwed him up to the fighting pitch. 'Twasn't the

money, nor any will to get the bettermost of Cleave, that made him stand up, but just his frame of mind at the time ; and therefore he said he'd fight that instant moment or not at all. But the mood was dangerous, and there's no doubt Will fought better then than ever he would have done after a month's training and in cold blood. His troubles made him a proper terror, for they stung him to his work and just put that pinch of devil into the man his nature lacked.

So, from the first round, Andrew found out he weren't going to win his five hundred without earning it. In fact the fight was not only a very brilliant affair from the sporting standpoint, as doctor never tired of telling his friends after, but it was packed full of interest, and no man knew till the battle was over how it would go, though after the twelfth round any present would have bet twenty to one about it. They was both clean-living men in splendid bodily trim, and they gave and took a lot. The fight lasted for eighteen rounds and was an hour and ten minutes long.

And it went like this, while the lucky beholders had the joy of their lives ; and behind the ring rose up Abe Chaffe's gert coffin, big as a house, shining so yellow as the sun in the grey winter light.

Round one found them feeling their way and sparring fresh and strong and brim full of nature. Andrew led and was short, but Will countered and got home a light one on the throat. He moved easier than Cleave and slipped him twice ; then they stood up and fought into a clinch. Will made no effort to wrestle, and went down to a cross buttock with Andrew on top. The next three rounds didn't get 'em much forwarder and was all like the first, save that Merry won the fall in the third ; but with the fifth, things began to move, and Andrew got first blood with a flush right on the mouth that shook up t'other man a lot. Then Will it was who left his mark, and after missing twice, he got home with his left on Cleave's eye and a straight right on the nose. Andrew fought back, but he had the worst of the round and lost the fall also.

He weren't hurt much, but there rose a mouse under his eye, and Tom White prayed Will to keep his attention on that. For if he could get one shutter up, the other was sure

to follow. Andrew knew the danger too, and in round six he boxed like a master and kept Merry's left out of his face very clever. Now they was properly tuned up and offered the prettiest part of the fight. Cleave got home on the mark at the end of the round, and when Merry was bent two-double for the fraction of a second, he upper-cut him and very near had him going ; but Will hung on, and it took a full minute to throw him ; and though shook and dazed, he managed to keep out of mischief in round seven, and used his legs and got in one lucky " haymaker " under Andrew's left ear before they closed. He won the fall also and had the best of a critical round, for Andrew thought he was in sight of the end and spared no trouble. But Will made him cover a lot of ground, and he was blowing and swearing at Will for not standing up to fight instead of running about. Which gave Tom White a tip, and he bade Merry do the like again and keep his man on the move.

" You're better on your legs than him, so keep holding him off and hit on the retreat where you can ; and if it gets him out of temper, you'll win," said Tom.

Round nine saw Merry's star well up. He took the fight to Cleave, who didn't expect it, and got home on his eye again, then stopped the return and danced off with Andrew after him. For the minute Cleave taunted Will, but it didn't draw anything but his wind, and when Merry came back he fought t'other to a standstill and got in the first knock down blow of the fight. 'Twas all his round, and Cleave had bellows to mend at the end of it. He didn't work so hard next round, and Will slacked off a bit too. There was a lot of feinting with nothing to it, but them as knew best believed they could spot the winner, and now reckoned Will was safe. And so he would have been, if he'd had the will to win, like Andrew ; but no man's ever safe from his own nature, in the ring or out of it.

In round eleven Cleave was a trier, and he got one over the heart that did Will no good, and just missed another upper-cut which might have turned the tables in his favour also. But Merry wasn't flustered, and though he didn't land in this round worth naming, he kept Cleave moving and, when the end came, had a shade the best of the fall. Andrew's eye was closed by now, and he'd got a deep cut

on his cheek that Caunter couldn't stop bleeding. They were growing a bit tired, but full of fight still for untrained men.

In round twelve Cleave tried very hard to finish, and he done a lot of work ; but he didn't do much damage, and Merry chose the round should be a long one. He pushed Andrew off when he wanted to close, and hit him down with a grand right at the end. 'Twas Merry's round, and he walked to his corner after, but Andrew was carried by the Caunters, for he'd got weak.

Will was weary too, though he came up for round thirteen the stronger man ; and now it was his business to force the fighting and get Cleave on the downward path to defeat if he could do it. Andrew saw what was coming, and the pluck and skill of the man showed itself, for he'd got himself well in hand now and knew it was going to be life or death for him in the next ten minutes. He sparred very steady and kept Will out for a bit, but he was handicapped by his sight, and at the end of the round got a right on the mouth that would have finished the scrap if it had been an inch lower. As it was it dropped him, and none thought there was any more to it ; but Jack Caunter done wonders, and when time was called, though a few shouted for the sponge to be thrown in, Cleave scorned the thought and came up, though his legs sagged under him.

Of course there was but one thing for Merry to do, and none knew it better than him ; but now the character of the man, ill fitted for this game, was a worse enemy to him than Andrew Cleave. He knew one straight punch in the face, or at most two, would finish Andrew, and he was still strong enough himself to do the needful. The other's guard was gone, and a boy could have hammered him out in two minutes ; but Merry's nature somehow rebelled against doing his duty at that great moment.

White and Josh Clemo both screamed at him like a pair of ravens to go in and win ; everybody else was shouting his head off also, and there stood Andrew, weak as a worm but defiant still with his face more like a stuck pig's than a man's, though a smile showed on it.

The snow was coming down thicker by now and lying in a layer on Abe's coffin lid. And Will, by virtue of his sad

weakness, held off. He couldn't find it in him to smash the defenceless creature up against him, but went easy.

"You shall have a fair run for your money, Andrew," he said—poor, silly soul!—and for answer Cleave tried a right, but missed and clinched.

They fell side by side, and while White and Clemo wasted time damning Merry, the chaps in Cleave's corner gave him some more brandy and worked at him with renewed hope. He came up for round sixteen a thought stronger and with all his wits about him, and when Merry, who'd heard about the betting, thought to right his mistake and set to work all he knew, the luck turned at last and smiled on Andrew, so that, small thanks to him, he managed to escape till he could grasp hold of Will and let himself be thrown.

The round tired Merry, who'd missed a lot of whole-hearted blows, and he was fretted, too, by his seconds, who forgot their part, and told him so like as not he had throwed away the fight for womanish weakness, and let a good few men round the ring drop their money. Anyway he was dog-tired when he came out again, and down-daunted, too, when he found Cleave a lot stronger. Andrew had weathered his bad time, and finding Will was now no better than himself, made a mighty effort to turn the tables. Cleave got Will on the ropes in this round and hit in a way that properly astonished the company His tail was up now, and there weren't no mistaken mercy in him. He felt he had still got more than a chance, and he took it and slammed Will's small ribs through a lot of in-fighting. There wasn't much steam to his blows; but at that stage every ounce told, and he weakened t'other so that when both fell down exhausted, not a man there thought either would come to the scratch again.

They was carried to their corners, and doctor, a sound sport in his way, axed 'em if a draw would content 'em; but Andrew shook his head and Clemo said Merry was all right.

So they stood up for round eighteen and last, and there's no doubt now that Will's spirit was willing enough and he badly wanted to win. But his flesh turned against him. He was in a lot of pain under the ribs, and it drawed him down so that he had to stoop. And Andrew was very near blind and swinging out of distance, for he said after he

could only see a moving lump where Merry was, and only knew he stood in distance when he felt his blows. 'Twas a helpless mess, for their powers were spent, and all saw that the first to get home would do the trick. Both missed time and again,and then, just as Merry was falling on Cleave, one of Andrew's arms met the side of his head. Will groped to catch Cleave, but he didn't, and instead went down on his face dead to the world. Andrew fell also, but he was conscious, and when Will come to, five minutes after, he heard the fight had gone. He didn't much mind seemingly, and shook hands with t'other, who was as blind as a bat by now.

Then doctor, who took the lead, finding but eight men left to carry Abraham Chaffe up the hill, made shift to move the seat of his gig and get the coffin in. So, with all pushing behind and helping the wheels, and the horse doing what he knew, they soon had the dead man up over, and rattled him along a good few miles till they was nigh Widecombe. And then they walked him in, solemn as owls; and the widow and parson were none the wiser about the delay till all was over and old Abe Chaffe had gone to earth. And I hope his fine ghost was by the ring and enjoyed itself, I'm sure, for 'tis a parlous pity if he weren't there to see his money won.

As for Will and Andrew, Caunter took 'em down to his house and put 'em to bed, where they bided for a couple of days; and they was great heroes in the land when the truth eventually comed to be known.

Cleave wanted for Will to have fifty of the money; but he wouldn't touch it, for a better thing than money befell him a week later and, such is the undying wonder of women, that when Milly Mansell heard how the man had fought and lost, she changed her mind again and took him for keeps, and wedded him on Easter Sunday, to his great content and joy.

"A creature of impulse to her dying day was she, but a very good mother to me and my wife; and I miss her yet," said Dick Merry as he finished his yarn. "I was more than a son to her in a manner of speaking, because my father, Will Merry, died three years after his marriage. He had three very good years with my mother, and then a tree what he was throwing fell askew, and it throwed him, poor chap, and he was dead as a beetle when they found him."

THE GREY FISHER

THE GREY FISHER

CHILDREN ban't what they used to be, and that's the middle and both ends of it. If I, as have had eight of 'em, and six still living, and me up home sixty-two, don't know the truth about 'em, who should ? And mine a good bit better than most by all accounts ; but there it is, the world's to the young ; they won the war, and they'll fling the war in our middle-aged faces so long as we be above ground to talk sense to 'em.

But this queer tale is about my first-born son, Richard Henry Bullstone, and the strange and fatal mystery that be wrapped up in the Bullstone race. It ain't often you hear tell of a family ghost or a cruel fate pursuing simple farm folk like us, though 'tis a common thing with the quality ; but an overhanging mystery was well known to the Bullstone people, ever since they settled by Cherrybrook, on Dartymoor, where they'd farmed and kept their cattle for generations out of mind. The very farm was called after 'em, and at Bullstone we still have a few rare keepsakes, such as the musket my husband's grandfather carried in the wars against Boney, and a fighting ship made of bones carved and built by a Frenchman, when Princetown was a great prison to hold the enemy's soldiers and sailors took captive in the wars.

Our ghost was like that more famous White Bird of Oxenham, as you may have heard tell about. For when the reigning head of the Oxenham race be marked for death he sees a white bird in his chamber—like to a snow-white swallow, I believe. And others also see it ; and so sure as the White Bird do flit for mortal eyes to mark, then the lord of the manor soon sinks into his grave. He may be at the world's end at the time, and often he is, for Oxenhams be great travellers ; but when the Bird is seen at Oxenham the

master's a goner. And our death watcher was a bird also, though not what you might call a witch bird, but just an everyday fowl, familiar to the eye. In the Bullstone race he is known as the Grey Fisher, and he comes in the form of a heron—a familiar sight upon our streams, of course.

The way of it is this. A hundred yards from Bullstone house-front Cherrybrook takes a bend, and there's a bit of a fall over an apron of rocks, and beneath opens out a pool, with a great bank to one side and a beach of pebble and silver sand on t'other. And that's Nicky Pool—so called because of the fearful tale of Nicky Gill in times long past. For there young Gill was cutting faggots from a fuzz-bush one autumn evening, with the reds in the sky and all so peaceful as you please. Then come a rush overhead and he marked some great flying thing go to earth behind the brake. Thinking 'twas a skein of geese come down, he crept to look, and there he seed a mother-naked witch, broomstick and all! And he marked that she was no less a woman than Jane Satterley, old Sally Satterley's daughter. For he seed her red hair and pretty face; and as he had promised to marry Jane and hoped to wed her soon, the shock turned his poor brain. He told the fearful tale, and Jane denied it on the Book and threw him over; and a fortnight after he ended his life in the pool, and whether the girl was a witch or not, who can say, for these things happened in the beginning of history.

But for Bullstones the pool meant trouble, because so sure as the Grey Fisher was seen beside it, the head of the family knew he must die. Again and again it fell out. The fatal bird was seen by my husband's grandfather a week before the old man catched his death feeding the pigs on a frosty morning; and though John Bullstone weren't troubled by it, and died natural without a sign, there's the sad tale of my own dear husband, and that's as true as gospel.

He come home in the midst of hay-harvest, for he was cutting our croft over against the Ashburton Road, and he tottered in with his eyes glazing out of his head and fell upon the settle with perspiration streaming down his red cheeks.

"Guy Fawkes and angels!" I said to the man. "Have 'e seen a ghost?"

" Yes, faith," he answered. " I've seed the Grey Fisher at Nicky Pool, and 'tis all over with me."

My eldest boy, Richard Henry, was home then from sea, and he tried to laugh his father out of his fears, for my family always made fun of the Grey Fisher till they larned better ; but master knew the game was up. We put a bold face upon it, and, God's my judge, after I'd heard the children talk and air their new knowledge as they was gathered daily at school, I took heart also and prayed my husband not to be down-daunted ; but, like a wise man, he knew there was no bluffing what he'd seen.

To please me he called on Parson Winter after prayers Sunday, and went in the vestry with him and had a long tell about it. Parson he took a high hand and said as my husband ought to scorn such a heathen fancy and not suppose that the Almighty would let a human life hang on the whim of a bird. However, the poor man had his family history behind him, and he didn't take no comfort from Mr. Winter. He was cruel moped for a day or two and scarce went farther than the farmyard ; and then he got reckless and rode about on his pony and was a good bit from home.

The blow fell ten days after he'd marked his doom ; and parson, for one, always held that my dear husband had to thank himself, and himself only, for his end. Anyway, my man, who was always a steady drinker, though seldom the worse for it except on Bank Holidays, let himself go on the liquor, feeling 'twas all one now. He come home drunk as a lord two evenings running, kept the house next day, then was off again, and we heard, afterwards, how he'd drunk himself blind at the " Seven Stars "—a pothouse on the Moreton road in mid-moor. Starting from there after dark, he made to reach home by Cocks Lake—a nasty place even in daylight—and there his pony, as never could carry beer, threw him, and he was found after two days' hue and cry by a water-keeper ; and his neck was broke, I'm sorry to tell.

A very terrible come-along of it, and how I lived through my misfortune God, He knows and no other. But such is life, and time went by, and Richard Henry, of course, left the sea and took up his father's work in due season. He

weren't a very clever farmer, but his brother, James, understood the business and did most of the work, for my eldest was a shotsman and never so happy as when tramping the wild places and wasting his time with a gun and a dog after the snipe and geese and plover. And by the same token he swore to be revenged upon the herons for his father's sad death, and he shot 'em whenever chance offered, till it was said not a heron could be seen on our part of the moors.

I would warn my eldest sometimes about being so lazy, and drop a hint that it might end in trouble where he least expected it, for his father had fallen out with him for going to sea, being no place for a first-born son in my husband's judgment. And so I knew a thing or two more than what the boy knew, and lawyer knew also. But Richard Henry went his way and never fretted and was very well content to let me and James do the work. Yet a very good, loving son to me until we quarrelled; but that happened after his father was dead five years. And then me and Richard Henry had a rumpus, and it looked a question of which was going to come out top.

He was a handsome boy and favoured the Bullstones, being tall, slim and fair, with a high colour and a rolling eye and a joke for everybody from squire to stone-breaker. And James was a dark, brown man, steady as time, with very little leisure to spare from work for talking. But, at nineteen, James was tokened to a maiden, so quiet and busy as himself—Thomas Kingwell's daughter, Lucy.

Kingwell farmed Dunnabridge and did all right most years; but he was in a smaller way than us, and my dear late husband had helped him over a stile more'n once. He was terrible pleased when James offered for Lucy, and so was his wife; but when I ordained that James was too young and must wait a year and a bit afore he took her, they fell in with it, and so did James and the girl.

He courted at the proper times, and his love-making never shortened his working hours by a minute; so all went very smooth, and I came to see that when they wedded there would have to be room made at Bullstone for the bride and the next generation. It promised well because two of my girls was out to work—one in a shop and tokened

to a young greengrocer at Ashburton, and one nursery-maid to the Reverend Winter's children. So there was going to be room for that matter. Then the thunderbolt fell from a blue sky, as they say, and Richard Henry broke his dreadful news to me one night after James and Lawrence and May was gone to bed.

"Mother," he says, "stiffen up a bit, for I be going to surprise you."

"Not you, my son!" I answered him. "You'll never surprise me till I see you doing a bit of man's work."

"I have been doing a bit of man's work," he answered. "I've been courting, and she has said 'Yes,' and I'm going to be married afore Christmas."

Well, he'd told the truth and surprised me all right, for somehow I'd reckoned there might be safety in numbers where Richard Henry was concerned. He'd always been a good bit addicted to the girls in a general way; but I never knew him to trouble much about 'em when the shooting season began. Worse, however, was to come.

To begin with I denied him flatly, and said I wouldn't hear of such a thing.

"You'm long ways short of wife-old, in my opinion," I said, "and I hope you'll drop this caper this instant moment. The lazy likes of you can't keep yourself, let alone a woman. And I won't listen to it till you be grown a lot older and wiser than there's any promise of at present."

"You didn't make no fuss over James," he answered, loading his pipe and evidently well-prepared to argue it out.

"Perhaps not," I replied, "but there's a great gulf fixed between you and James. He's got an old head on young shoulders, and stands to work, and don't let courting interfere with his duty."

"No more don't I," replied Richard Henry.

"For the best of all possible reasons," I answered him, "because you never do your duty. And till you face your duty and take up your share of the farm labour and behave yourself like a responsible creature——"

"There, there," he interrupted me, "that's all right! I know what work means. If an old merchant sailor don't know the meaning of work, 'tis a pity. I've been resting these five years, you may say, since I came ashore; but I

can work, when I'm so minded, with the best. I be the sort that's not particular anxious to shine at hard labour on my own account; but now I've got to think of Nancy, it'll be different I assure 'e."

Well, I said nothing for the moment, and just ran my mind over the Nancys round about our parts. And I could call home three. There was Nancy Veale—a little go-by-the-ground thing, the washer-woman's darter up to Princetown, and it certainly weren't like to be she, for she was a very homely soul with a glide in her right eye. And there was Nancy Catt—a very fine piece indeed, and thought to be no better than she should be, though to say truth I'd never heard a word against her, save in a woman's mouth here and there. But she was the daughter of Tobias Catt, landlord of the "Seven Stars," a man I hated worse than sin, for I well knew that if he'd looked after my poor husband on that fatal night and not let him ride forth drunky to his doom, things might be different. Toby Catt was renowned for serving drink to them as had had enough, and he'd been pulled up once and again for the crime and very near lost his licence; and Nancy kept the bar—a saucy, bold wench, with a fine shape and corn-coloured hair and blue eyes. She was only eighteen and spoiled by the men—an untidy, trolloping sort of girl and not so nice in her dress and ways as pretty maidens generally are.

Lastly, there was Nancy Sweet—Farmer Sweet's daughter at Bair Down, a very steadfast young woman, two years older than my son, but a pattern to the maidens in general. Her parents' right hand she was, a prize-winner at butter-making again and again, and a teacher in Sunday school also. Not what you'd call a pretty woman, but better than that. Thin as a board, I grant, and a thought frosty to the eye, but good as gold in her heart and not at all a stand-off from the respectable males. And if the zanies had any sense and didn't always choose the girls like a blackbird chooses a cherry—for the outside—there's no doubt that Nancy Sweet would have found a husband a good bit sooner than she did.

I knew, however, that my Richard Henry was often along with Nancy's father up over, for Mr. Sweet was very fond of shooting and all manner of sports, so I put two and

two together and reckoned it must be the Bair Down girl. But wonder was uppermost in my mind without a doubt, and I voiced my wonder when I answered the boy.

"I'm surprised that Nancy Sweet saw much in you," I said.

"And might have been a bit more surprised if I'd seen much in her!" he answered. "Why, God's truth, my old chuckle-head, if there wasn't a woman left in the world, I wouldn't have no use for that psalm-smiting old maid."

That was the coarse way Richard Henry talked; and yet always so pleasant and full of kindly laughter that you couldn't call him over the coals for it.

My heart sank. "It won't be Nancy Veale?" I said.

"You bet your life it won't!" he answered. "Have another shot."

"There's only Toby Catt's daughter left as I can think upon," I murmured.

"'Only Toby Catt's daughter'!" he cried out. "And what in thunder can any living man want better than Toby Catt's daughter? She's a proper miracle of goodness and loveliness. There's things hid in Nancy you'd never believe. And she loved me the first day she set eyes on me, long ago, and told me herself that all the other men was no better than shadows against me. A masterpiece—that's what she is; and there ain't no other word in the dictionary to get within a mile of her."

Well, I was firm as a rock, and I began as I fully meant to go on.

"Once and for all, Richard Henry," I said to my son, "it shall not be. I don't often put my foot down, as you well know; but when I do, it stops down, and principalities and powers won't lift it. So long as I'm on the ground and not under," I said, "you don't marry Nancy Catt. There's more reasons against than hairs on your head, and, for one, it was her beastly parent drove the first nail in the coffin of your own father and let him go out unprotected on the moor, well knowing he was bosky-eyed at the time. And, as I've always said and always will say, Toby Catt had more to do with my husband's broken neck than the Grey Fisher, or anybody else. And if you think I'll let you get tokened to that murderer's daughter, you think wrong. Never, never shall it be! And if you was half a man and loved your

dear father as you ought, you'd never have darkened the door of the 'Seven Stars,' let alone tinker up to the daughter of the house. 'Tis a very ill-convenient come-along-of-it," I said, "and I'm a good bit put about that you should have lowered yourself to such a horrid and shameful thought; and if you'd do your proper work and not go dancing after every giglet wench that turns her bold eyes on you, it would be a darned sight better for my peace of mind and your own self-respect."

I heaved with indignation afore this black news, and the more I talked and put it in words, the worse it sounded. I kept at him till I got a pain in my side, which always happens after many words, and Richard Henry, to my surprise, listened very patient and sucked his pipe, thoughtful-like, while I rolled on.

Then, after I'd stopped for the minute and was getting my second wind, for I well knew it would be do or die betwixt us, he spoke.

"You calm down, my old dear," he said. "There's a lot too much of you to get so excited, and well you know you'll have one of your spasms if you get above yourself."

"Little you care for my spasms," I answered him; but he swore a foreign oath he'd picked up in some godless place that he cared a brave lot and loved me more'n anything in the world after Nancy Catt.

"There's things that may happen and there's things that must happen," he said, cool as a fish, "and things that may happen do or do not; and the things that must happen be going to. And one of them things is that I must marry my Nancy. 'Tis fore-ordained, and nothing on two legs nor yet ten will ever stop it. You see the girl, mother, and have a tell with her and sound her sense. Why, bless your heart, she's your sort—just the hard-working, straight, sensible kind you be always saying are all dead and buried nowadays. For cleverness there's not her like. I often feel a fool afore her myself."

"I dare say you do," I answered. "She's had lots of practice at twisting the men round her fingers, by all accounts, and you wouldn't be difficult."

He smiled, and his smile was always a beautiful thing though his own mother says it.

" You won't make me angry," he said. " I know what I know ! "

" You know what I've told you," I replied to him, " and you also know that I ban't one to change. There's no shadow of turning about me. I've got the whip hand of you, Richard Henry, thanks to the wisdom of your father, who understood you very well, and God's my judge," I said, " if you don't go back on this you'll repent it to your dying day."

He saw I weren't to be argued with no more, and doubtless thought that if I slept on it I'd come round.

" I'm very safe in the hands of such an honourable old bird as you," he said. " And now you go to bed, mother, and pleasant dreams."

" A woman with a great, know-nought loblolly for a son don't have many pleasant dreams," I told the boy ; then I took his advice and kissed him, and he lit my cannel, and I went to my chamber. And dreams, pleasant or otherwise, I certainly did not have, for I never closed my born eyes till day ; and when I came down house again—late for breakfast—'twas such an unheard-of adventure I should be after time that my children all said 'twas cruel to have such a lazy mother—all but James, who never made a joke in his life, and none the worse for that.

Well, there it was, and I took the matter to my Maker, and parson, and a good few other elderly people whose opinion could be relied upon ; and one and all, except the Reverend Winter, advised most steadfast against. He, for reasons best known to himself, thought as it were a case where Nature might be allowed to take its course ; but he wasn't a very practical man, though a tower of strength in matters of doctrine ; and as for Nature, I'd seen a lot too much of Nature taking its course on Dartymoor, and didn't want to see no more. My conscience was perfectly clear on the subject. I knew it would be a fatal match for Richard Henry ; and after a matter of three or four months he found that he was up against it and I weren't going to change.

He brought Nancy Catt to tea one Sunday—sprang her on me—and I don't say she wasn't a proper, bowerly maiden in her tidy Sabbath gown and nice shoes. And, of course, in my presence, she looked after her manners and

behaved very nice indeed. She chose her words also, and kept up her head, and took the right line between being bold on the one hand and cringing on the other. She made a good tea and praised my cakes, but not too much, and then she talked of sensible things, and didn't hide the fact that her father was very poor, and began to think of leaving "The Seven Stars" and go down to the "in country" for his health's sake.

"He won't get away from his conscience, however," I told the girl. "And I'm thinking, when he remembers Mr. Bullstone, my husband, it must give him a sharp pinch."

"That was before my time, Mrs. Bullstone," she answered, "because I be only just turned eighteen, and I'm sure, if father reckoned he'd had a hand in that sad affair, he'd never forgive himself."

I was civil, but she didn't thaw me; and when Richard Henry saw she didn't, he said he'd done his tea; and so they rose up and went off.

I dressed him down about it after, and he vowed he was sorry he'd brought her if I was, but had thought and hoped a sight of her might soften me.

So it went on, and a month later, if Tobias Catt himself didn't poke his nose into Bullstone and ask for the pleasure of a few words!

He was a man with a thin, dirty beard, and a moustache so yellow as a guinea along of his smoking. He had shifty eyes and a nose that told the thinking mind that he dipped quite as often as his customers. He kept clearing his throat and tapping his knee with his fingers; and he bowed his head to every word I said to him, as if he was hearing the wisdom of Solomon.

I didn't keep him long, but gave him enough to think about on the walk home to his inn. He came, of course, to see if he could find a way for the engagement to go on pleasant all round.

"Love's love," he said, "and we as be getting to the middling stage, though you keep so young as your children seemingly, mustn't forget what it was to feel like that. I had a good wife and you had a rare good husband——"

"I'll thank you to keep his name off your lips," I said. "It's like your impudence to touch him."

Seeing he'd drawed blank, he began again and went on for a bit about Nancy's fine qualities, and what an honest, upright fellow Richard Henry appeared to be, and so on. Then I cut him short, and ended the sitting in five minutes.

"It's like this," I said. "I'm determined it shan't happen. I'm as fixed as a rock against it for a proper hatful of reasons. I don't like it and I won't have it. And if Richard Henry goes against me he'll be a ruined man, once and for all. And whether you're wishful for your girl to marry a ruined man is your business. It stands like this. My late husband—and I'm sorry to mention him in your ear—my late husband knew all about Richard Henry, and so this farm be mine—lock, stock, and barrel—not my son's, and not nobody else's. I shall leave Bullstone as I please, and my bit of money as I please; and if my eldest was to take your daughter, it would be goodbye so far as I'm concerned to the pair of 'em. So now you know!"

That hit him pretty hard, as I knew it would; for he thought, like a good many other people, how Richard Henry was down for the farm. So Mr. Catt rubbed his nose a bit when he'd heard what I'd got to say, and then he patted his knee again.

"You fairly astonish me," he said. "But you be one of them that never leaves anybody in doubt of your meaning; and, of course, if that's your last word, and your eldest don't inherit the farm save by your good pleasure, the case is altered. Because it wouldn't do for my daughter to take a young chap as had quarrelled with his salvation, would it?"

He got up then, and I didn't trouble to answer his question. He bade me "Good evening!" rather short and went off, with a walk like a lurcher dog. He didn't keep shut about what I'd told him, either, and very soon it was common knowledge; but the bettermost all held that I had done right, though such is the pleasure we take in our neighbour's affairs that the matter interested a good many beyond my place, or the "Seven Stars" either, and I heard long after how a few godless chaps had bets about it, and more than one backed Richard Henry to come out top in the long run.

He was a lot put about when he found Toby hadn't done

no good, and still more so to learn the black and white of his own position. But this I can say: he never forgot himself to me, but only grew a bit silent and melancholy. And then the crash came, and that happened that brought every eye in the parish on my son and cast me and all of us into a great and fearful despair.

Too well I remember the morning, a day in October—a clear, cold dawn, but with clouds hanging low to the south and offering rain afore noon.

I'd just got up, and was doing my hair in front of the looking-glass with my mouth full of hairpins. Then, casting my eyes out of the window, I saw it—The Grey Fisher by Nicky Pool.

I stared, made cruel sure it was the bird, then gave a scream, and fell down lumpus in a faint. I was told after that my daughter May heard the fall, for I shook the house; and she rushed in and fetched me round. But I said nought and hoped against hope 'twas only a spectrum in my mind's eye and not the real thing. God forgive me, I'd meant to tell 'em I'd had a spasm and was all right again; but there weren't no hiding the horror, for old Sam Scobell, our head man, had seen it also, from up by the cowshed; and another had seen it too.

Richard Henry came in after we'd all set to breakfast, and he was so white as a dog's tooth, and his head shook as he kissed me "Good morning."

Then he told it out, and hoped we'd all be brave about it, and make no upstore.

"Fate's fate," he said, "and I'm cruel sorry to say as my thread have got to be cut afore very long. I've seed the Grey Fisher this morning to Nicky Pool."

"So have I!" moaned old Sam; and then he began to cry over his dish of porridge and pushed it from him. Of course, May began to yowl also, and my youngest, Lawrence; and I had to be short and sharp and tell 'em to remember they was Bullstones and not babies. And James, though even he couldn't let down his meal after the fatal news, said:

"We must put a bold face upon it, Richard Henry, and hope you was mistook. It may have been a curlew, or some rare bird as looked like the Grey Fisher in the dimpsy light of morning."

" Be sure I looked twice, Jimmy," his brother answered very quiet. " There weren't no mistake. I've shot too many herons not to know 'em. 'Twas the Fisher all right."

" Without a doubt," snivelled Sam. " Without a doubt 'twas the accursed fowl ! "

A very wisht breakfast, sure enough ; and if it hadn't been for the pluck and sense of the poor victim himself, I don't know what would have become of us. We went about the work of the day in a dream, and got through with it as best we might ; and then, of course, the cruel news was blazed abroad, and a stream of neighbours fell in to maunder about it and pity us. But pity's poison to me best of times, and I strained a friendship here and there afore a fortnight was past.

You see, for all his lazy ways and good-for-nothing customs, nobody ever had a hard word for Richard Henry. He was one of them easy, kind, good-natured men you can't quarrel with, though you feel you did ought—his own enemy no doubt, but none else's. And when it was generally understood that the Bullstone's evil bird had been seen by me and Sam and my son himself, everybody felt properly vexed about it.

'Tis a very painful thing to wait for a death best of times, even when all's going right and proper, and the doctor coming regular, and Nature doing her job quick, or slow, as the case may be ; but to have the shadow hanging over your eldest in his prime, and everything right, and nought but stark wonder to know how and when the blow will fall —that's right-down Hell, and not parson himself can deny it.

Then, while we lived on and time passed, and I properly tormented my rheumaticky knees praying to God upon 'em, a strange thing happened, for if Nancy Catt didn't come to tea again ! I could see the trouble was on her, too, and I hadn't no heart to fight about it, but just let her eat and drink and twitter, with her eyes on my son.

And though he was a changed man of late, as well he might be, with never a laugh, nor joke, nor whistle about the house, yet so long as that girl sat by him he heartened a bit, and a little colour rose to his cheeks, and his grey eyes looked a thought less haunted.

I let her come of a Sunday after that, and the more so

because my son had promised me on oath he wouldn't go into the "Seven Stars," nor yet any other public house. I remembered his father, and begged him with many tears not to do anything to bring the danger on himself. And he didn't. He lived the life of a child, and it would have puzzled anybody, less than the Almighty, to know how Death was going to get Richard Henry.

So his sweetheart dropped in to tea as a regular thing on Sundays; and in my mind the mystery grew how her beast of a father could have got such a nice, sensible girl.

And then, to my amazement, if the man didn't begin again about wedding her!

Of course, I reckoned that matter was done for, and in the calm that had come over my son I saw Providence working to get his mind sober and resigned, so that his end should be such as a Christian ought to make. But now he wanted to take Nancy, while yet there was time; and she was for it also, because she said, in her simple way, that she'd a long sight sooner be Richard Henry's widow than the wife of any other man in the world. They were set upon it in season and out, until I could see something had got to be done.

All the rest was for it, too, and even James, a man without a spark of nonsense in him, thought, since Richard Henry's days were running out, it might be kind to let him have his little bit of pleasure if there was yet time.

"I don't pretend I want a widow and perhaps a baby on my hands," said James to me in secret; "but there it is. I'm terrible fond of my brother, as you well know, and if you don't let him have her, if 'tis only to close his eyes, you'll be a good bit remorseful, I shouldn't wonder, after he's took."

So there it was, and I relented, for what the mischief else could I do? And the moment I ordained it might be, Richard Henry kissed me afore the family, and said I'd never regret it when the grass was waving over him, and so on.

They didn't waste no time, and I couldn't blame 'em there, seeing the circumstances. They was axed out to church the very next Sunday, and the wedding was fixed for the end of November.

And the care my boy took of himself meantime would have been funny if it hadn't been so sad. He was smoking

by the fire most of his days, but he went so far as Ashburton to buy a wedding-ring and a tokening-ring for Nancy and a wedding suit for himself. He walked both ways, however, because, he said, to trust a hoss, after what had overtook his father, would be asking for it.

The wedding swept upon us like a thunderstorm, and for my part I lived in a dream till the deed was done. Richard Henry come up to the scratch in very fine fettle indeed, and so did Nancy Catt. We had a brave rally of neighbours to church—drawn for the most part by the queerness of the business—and I reckon that more than one nasty-minded party thought to see my son fall dead at the altar rail. But nought overtook him then, and everybody agreed that a handsomer or more high-stepping pair never was wed 'pon the Moor, or anywhere else. And Tobias Catt, who, by the way, little liked the job, and said from the first it was playing with fire, nevertheless looked ahead, in his crafty way, and no doubt guessed that whatever fell out, Nancy might count on her husband's people till she took another.

And Catt did the wedding-party very well indeed—in fairness to the man that have got to be said. I sat alongside him at the feast and kept a stiff upper-lip, though my heart was in my boots, needless to say ; but we worked up a good bit of fun considering, and Richard Henry come out in his old colours, and put his fate behind him for the time being, and made us laugh, though with death in our hearts, no doubt.

Toby Catt confided in me that he was off at quarter day, and meant to have a sale afore he went ; so, when the meal was done and the men were smoking and having a bottle of spirits, and the bride and groom waiting for a carriage to draw 'em to Moreton for their honeymoon, I strolled round, unbeknowst, to have a look at Catt's horse, which I knew was a good animal and worth buying for our market-cart. And in the two-horse stable I found him, and in the other stall—in the manger, poking his beak out from under a truss of hay—was a great stuffed heron—the living daps of the Grey Fisher of Nicky Pool !

I kept my head, however, though a spasm I did have unseen by any but my Maker. I kept my head, because,

though all was bitter clear the moment I set eyes on that bird, yet Providence reminded me, even at that crushing moment, how my son's crime cut both ways.

He'd done me, of course, and got what he wanted by a hookem-snivey trick upon his faithful mother, and very near broke my heart doing it; but, against that, it shone out how Richard Henry was meant to go on living. That's life all over—you be called to take the good with the bad, and your childer, no matter what hateful pigs they be, are better alive than dead, I suppose.

We saw 'em off; and a week later we saw 'em home; and I kept my little surprise for 'em though I'd lost no time to ease the minds of everybody else about it afore the day was done. And James took a hard view, and May was for mercy, and as for Tobias Catt, he swore before his God that it was all news to him; and he appeared so properly thankful that Richard Henry was saved alive, I hadn't the heart to do much in that quarter except buy his horse.

And when the wedded pair returned, they took the wind out of my sails again, as usual, for at supper, bolder than brass, Richard Henry confessed to everything, and how he planted the bird by the pool overnight, well knowing my eyes would be the first to see it; and how, when he knew all was done, he'd took it away again and hid it, and fetched it back to the "Seven Stars," because he meant it for a family heirloom ever after!

And, looking back, I'm always glad I didn't say more than a quarter I felt, because wonders never cease, and my son, from that time forward, turned a new leaf and stood to his work, and took his place as a reasonable and trustworthy man. And a better, truer daughter-in-law than his yellow-haired wife no woman ever had, nor yet nicer-looking grandchilder.

And as for my James, he was soon out of the home nest after that, and looked after himself, and few young men cleverer to do so. He's wed now; but his Lucy ain't a patch for brains on Nancy, and she don't like me so well, neither.

So you can see pretty much what I mean when I say the world's to the young, and 'tis little good withstanding the creatures, for they will have the last word—more shame to 'em.

THE HONESTY OF NOAH

THE HONESTY OF NOAH

If any man had told me I should ever find it hard to be honest, he'd have had the rough edge of my tongue without a doubt; for, along of my parents and schooling, not to mention my own particular nice bent of mind, there were some things, even as a young man, would have given me more pain than pleasure to do, no matter what the reward. And one was to covet my neighbours' goods, and another was to break my word.

As for what belonged to other folk, I never did feel tempted in that direction; but life so fell out with me that once, and only once, I catched myself terrible sore about a solemn promise. It related to the most awful undertaking that can be made between one human to another, and that is the promise to marry: so I thought no small shame on myself that even for an instant, I felt a cruel hankering to go back on my word. Yet so it was.

Two great adventures I have had in my life, and that's all. And both belong to this tale. But nothing out of the common tremendous have ever happened since, and I hope, for the rest of my days, to creep along without no more shocks till there comes the call. Life's a very interesting thing, taking it all round, and I'm fairly glad that I was born, but I shall have had quite enough of it come I get to seventy, or thereabouts, and won't want no more.

At twenty-five I was outdoor man at the "Coach and Four," a little public on the Plymouth Road, out Yelverton way; and though a small house, it had a lot of custom. and there was plenty of work for me with the traffic and the hosses, especially in winter, when hounds met at our place pretty often.

Small money I had, but, so far, the thought of money never troubled my mind. My chances to spend it, if I got

it, were small, for I was an orphan man by then, with no calls upon me and no particular need to save. I'd been an only one, and my relations were all dead, so far as I knew, and I never had very many at any time. My father was coachman at Eylesbarrow Manor till he went home, and he'd had but one brother and one sister. Aunt Sarah died in a lunatic asylum, poor soul—the first in our family ever known to be tootlish—and Uncle Geoffrey, he'd gone to Canada, or else Australia, in his young days. My father never could call to mind which it was, and it didn't matter, for us heard of him no more, and he was only a name to me.

But then happened the first of my two adventures, and after Jane Blight came in the bar of the "Coach and Four" I was a lost man. I dare say she stood three inches taller than me, for at twenty-two—which was her age when first we met—she'd rose to her full growth, and nobody ever saw a finer woman, with a deeper bosom or bigger shoulders or stronger arms. She was high-coloured, and she had blue eyes and a proper mane of wonderful hair that kept the bar warm on the coldest day. 'Twas like a burning, fiery furnace. Most times, with that sort, you get a temper to match the flame, and a hustling way, and sometimes rather a high hand; but though Jane was a towser for work and the cleanest creature that ever wasted time washing herself, her temper was sweet and she'd got it well under control. Bright as a lark she was, and a rare one for a bit of fun, and proper glad to feel alive; but being the eldest of nine had broke her in something amazing, and she was patient with the fools, and never gave a sharp answer to man or woman, though her natural good wits must have often tempted her to do so.

In fact, Miss Blight stood long ways ahead of any female that I'd ever come across, and though, until she appeared, no girl had struck me as a very interesting object, with her the case was entirely altered, and she set me thinking very serious, and roused in me a sort of muddle-headed and bitter-sweet frame of mind as I hadn't felt before. Months passed, and it got worse, and still I couldn't understand what distraction had overtook me, but then all of a sudden I found 'twas Jane had awoke these queer sensations, and I axed her to go for a walk on her afternoon out, little thinking

she'd consent to it. In fact, so foggy be the beginnings of love, that when she said she'd come, I was half sorry I'd spoke. But it would have been a rude thing to back out after she'd agreed, so I fixed with Jack Codd, my fellow worker, to look after my job that Thursday afternoon, and me and Jane footed it up to Princetown on Dartmoor, and she consented to take a cup of tea at the "Three Feathers" in that place.

Well, I hadn't gone above a mile beside the woman when I knew that I'd falled in love with her, and the astonishment of it tied my tongue to such an extent that I dare say I didn't speak more'n once in five hundred yards. But she made up for that, and I soon saw she was friendly disposed and found herself very comfortable in my company. She told me about her family, and how she had to send most of her money to her mother and father, him being out of work. And she drew rather a sorrowful picture of their position, but she weren't in the least sorrowful herself, being far too clever and cheerful to whine over what couldn't be helped by her.

And I listened in wonder, for I'd never guessed a woman could be so sensible. In fact, such a witty way of looking at life made me think better of females in general, because, till then, I'd never met one with the sense of a woodlouse.

She made a very good tea, and when we started for home, she said:

"Now, Mr. Scobhull, you've heard all about me, so 'tis your turn to talk, and I won't walk quite so fast going backalong, please, because I'm a heavy-weight, and up a hill I'm not too clever."

"You'm the cleverest woman ever I met," I said. "Up a hill, or down a hill, either. And I hope you'll call me 'Noah' in future, same as my other friends do. I wouldn't have given myself the name of 'Noah' I may tell you, because there's a lot about that famous character I don't hold with; but my parents, being quite unable to decide the question, my father opened the Book with his eyes shut, and my mother stuck a pin into the holy page, and 'Noah' it was."

After that we got on very well, and I unfolded my feelings and found Jane to be as good a listener as a talker, which

seldom happens, and before we reached the "Coach" we'd ordained to take another walk in a week or two. She was very fond of the sea, I found, which be rather an uncommon taste with women, I believe.

The friendship got red-hot in six weeks, and just after Christmas, or it might have been New Year's Day, I offered for her, but not afore I felt so sure as death she was going to take me. For such is my modest nature that I don't believe I could have axed if my love-quickened senses hadn't made me see that she'd be down my throat the moment I did.

Though a thought under-sized, I was a good-looking man, no doubt, with very nice black hair and rather big eyes and a sound lot of large, white teeth; but such things as that wouldn't have decided her; it was my high-minded nature and my way of looking at life she liked most. As a matter of truth she had no use for dark-coloured men, and, as I found after, my hair and blue chin had stood against me; but my nature made these things of small account, and, in a word, we felt ourselves to be built for each other, body and soul, and was tokened accordingly in the face of the nation.

But then came reality, and I told Jane frankly how, on a pound a week, marriage weren't in sight for me, and she saw that very clear indeed, and said we must be patient and bide our time. There weren't no inclination on my master's part to raise her money, nor yet mine, when the engagement came to his ears. In fact, the boss was a bit vexed behind our backs, as I heard from Jack Codd, though too decent a sort of man to make any words about it. But he reckoned that if I loved Jane it wouldn't make me any more useful out-of-doors, and if she loved me there might be a drop of whisky slip over the bar sometimes, or perhaps a half-pint, that weren't paid for in the ordinary way.

But he didn't know me, for anything like that I would rather have gone thirsty than do, and no straighter and honester woman than Jane Blight ever pulled a cork or a lever.

Then, after six months, which didn't cool our fine affection, nor yet bring marriage a day nearer by the look of it, I got an offer from a gentleman fishing on Dartmoor and stop-

ping at the "Coach and Four." He liked me and reckoned I might be worth thirty bob a week to him; so I talked it over with Jane, and though she felt the sting of the parting a good deal, she knew this was a useful step along the road to better times, and agreed that I should accept and give notice.

Then my troubles began, for after two months with my new master he had a sad disaster and lost all his money, and didn't want me no more. And they wouldn't take me back at the "Coach," neither, because my place was filled. I was on my beam ends for a bit, and the twenty pounds I'd saved had to be all eat up to keep me going. Then I found work again, but not at thirty bob. I fell to a pound, and after six months of that got another offer and rose to twenty-five shillings. I was in the Midlands now, and hated 'em, and would have given the boots off my feet to be back in Devonshire again. We wrote to each other, Jane and me, but her letters were scarcer than mine, because pens and ink were always pain and grief to her; and then I dried up, too, for a bit, for my new master died very sudden, and I was out in the world again, and didn't want to make my future wife sorrowful about it.

For a matter of three years we did keep in touch, and then I lost her. I'd not wrote for six months, but presently my conscience spoke, and being with good work once more, at a big hotel in Birmingham, I wrote and told Jane that things were looking up, and I hoped, if I could get a few days off at the end of the autumn, to come down to the West and see her.

But the letter was returned to me marked "Not known"; and to get a letter you've wrote to another person come back staring you in the face again be a great shock, I'm sure.

I was a good bit put about, though Jane had grown a little faint in my mind's eye by that time; but I wrote to my old master for her address, and he sent a postcard saying that Jane Blight had been gone from the "Coach" for six months, and he didn't know more'n the dead where she was got to, or what she was doing.

I felt it a good deal for an hour or so, and then I went out and axed a friend of mine at Birmingham what I ought to do in such a case. She was a young person in a

tobacconist's shop, and I was drawn to her because she came from Devon—a Devonport woman, born and bred in the Three Towns. We'd seen a good bit of each other, chiefly of a Sunday, and she understood my nature and I understood hers very well indeed. Aggie Bassett her name was, and she had a nice, stand-off manner and well knew what she owed to herself. She was a quick, rather thin little thing—a saver, and amazing good at figures. She also liked going to church and learned me to like it ; and once there she sang the hymns very sweet indeed, and urged me to attempt it also, which I had done to oblige her, with fair success.

We were both home-sick, and her hope and prayer, like mine, was to get back to Devon some day.

On the subject of Jane I found Aggie not too helpful. Such was her high spirit and religion that she done her very best for Jane I do believe ; but I knew, by signs, that she'd got a good bit of feeling for me herself by now, and at the bottom of her heart I do think she'd rather have heard I couldn't find Jane. But, like me, she was the soul of honour, and she knew my word was given in that quarter, never to be withdrawn.

I thought to advertise, but remembering that Jane had no use for newspapers and seldom opened such a thing, I doubted if that would not be to throw away good money. And Aggie feared so, too. She reckoned that Jane was probably in Plymouth at her trade, and wondered if I could get a list of the public-houses and send a postcard to each of 'em. We was turning over that and other projects for a few weeks, when I made the shameful discovery that I'd pretty near forgot Jane and was now fallen in love with Aggie ; and then, crushing in upon this, there came the second and greatest adventure of my life.

A letter arrived for me from my old home—North Tawton village, where my father and mother had lived all their days. It was from a lawyer, and it had been sent to the " Coach and Four " ; and, along of me having written the year previous to ax for news of Jane Blight, my old master knew where I was and sent the letter after me. And I got it.

The lawyer wrote that my father's brother was dead at the Cape of Good Hope, in Africa, so my father was wrong

after all about where he'd gone to; but the amazing thing followed. Uncle Geoffrey had left my father all his money, and father and mother being dead, the money was mine. Five thousand pounds he had saved, though whether such a hugeous sum had been honestly come by, who shall say? There it was, however, and when I took the news to my friend at the tobacco shop she congratulated me, and said that no man ever deserved a fortune better.

"Five thousand pounds is two hundred and fifty pounds a year, at five per cent., Noah," she said, "and don't you try to get no more."

"And what shall I do first?" I axed her, and, like the Christian woman she was, she made answer:

"Find your Jane, I should think," said Aggie Bassett.

'Twas a frosty reply, in a manner of speaking, and yet I loved her all the better for it.

"You teach me my duty," I said, "though, God forgive me, I could wish it weren't my duty."

She understood very well what I was aiming at.

"Duty's duty, Noah," she answered, "and if you didn't do what's right you'd never forgive yourself, and very likely spoil all your future life."

"Duty did ought to be a comfort and a solace," I said. "But 'tis a great mistake, Aggie, to think that the way of duty is always the way of happiness, because I be going damn soon to find it ain't."

"No need to swear about it, anyhow," she said. "What the future have got hid for you no man knows, but what you are called to do looks mighty clear to me, and that is to go to Plymouth and work through the Three Towns till you find your sweetheart."

Needless to say the word struck me dumb, for Jane was no more sweetheart of mine, even though the solemn promise remained. The spell was properly broke, after all these years, and I didn't want to marry her, nor yet even see her again if I could help it.

Aggie somehow knew, despite all my sad silence, what was moving in my mind.

"You can't tell how you'll feel about it till you find her," she said. "So like as not, when you do, if God wills for you to join her once more, the old feeling may blaze up in

you again, Noah, and then you'll see how Providence watches over the sparrow."

"As to what I'll feel," I answered, "I know a plucky sight more about that than you can. And there's times when you catch yourself wishing that Providence would mind its own business and let you mind yours. But, to the bitter end, I'll do my duty. I've saved fifty pounds these last two year, and now I'll give notice and leave the hotel and get West, and since you be taking your own holiday, I don't see no reason why you shouldn't go down to visit your aunt at Devonport, same as you have promised to do. Then we'll travel together. I deserve some reward," I said, "and that will be reward enough."

She didn't think it at all wise, and no doubt it weren't, but I pressed for sharing the journey, and at last she consented.

On the way down to Plymouth I asked Aggie how long I did ought to take searching for Jane. I weren't in a very good temper, because the night before I had given a bit of a send-off party to my men friends, to celebrate my fortune, and I'd got the headache along of doing so.

"I can't go on hunting the earth for the woman for ever," I said, "and you must always remember, please, that 'twas her stopped writing first, not me. And when she changed her address, proper feeling should have let me know."

Aggie Bassett considered.

"I should say if you was to search honest for six weeks, your conscience would be clear, Noah," she assured me, "because by that time your duty will be done; and if she don't turn up, then it's tolerable certain that Providence have got other views for you."

"Yes," I said, "and I hope Providence have got my own view, and what that is nobody knows better than you."

"I won't pretend I don't," she answered, "but we needn't think so far ahead. Something tells me as you'll find Jane, if you honestly look for her; and if you wasn't honest about it, then no doubt your sin would find you out."

"'Sin' is too big a word," I told her, "but, be it as it will, I shall seek around sharp as a needle for a fortnight, and if we don't meet then, I'll advertise in the *Western*

Morning News, and though she'll never see it, for she's no scholar, somebody that knows her may perhaps do so. And even that's going too far in my opinion."

We left it so, and when we got to North Road Station, Aggie changed for her aunt at Devonport, and I went on. I knew her address, and she granted me permission to come to tea after I'd hunted for a week.

I drew a blank, and told her so; but she saw my spirits had rose according, so she begged me to keep myself in hand and remember that Providence was guiding me. Then another week passed by and I met Aggie again, and we took tea on the pier and drew out an advertisement offering a reward of three pounds to anybody who could give information about Miss Jane Blight, formerly a barmaid at the "Coach and Four" to Yelverton.

We parted, with more warnings to me not to be so hopeful, and I was to see Aggie again the next day, being Sunday, because on Monday her holiday would come to an end and she had to go back to Birmingham.

And then it was, just about lighting-up time, that my great trial and temptation fell upon me, for half-way to the office of the newspaper, to hand in the advertisement about Jane, I comed across the woman herself!

I see a great, big creature, built much like a pouter-pigeon, looking into a shop where they sold women's stays; and I couldn't help feeling, with her generous build, no doubt stays interested her so much as anything. And then she turned, and I saw Jane Blight.

'Twas the Jane I'd known, yet changed, and grown from bud to blossom, you might say. She'd drawed the beam at eleven stone six when we kept company; but now, to my eye, she looked every ounce of thirteen stone, if not more. The fat had rose up to her face also, and her high colour hadn't got no fainter, and her hair fairly jumped at you. Life to some men, no doubt—such a woman—but death to me.

I fell back for a moment, and my legs twitched to fly from her, while a perspiration broke out like dew upon my forehead and the back of my neck. But there it was—Providence—and I knew myself so well that I felt there was only one thing for me to do. Another man might have slipped

her, and thanked his stars for the chance to do so, and never felt nothing about it after, more than gratitude for his luck. But with a conscience like mine, if I'd bolted, it would have been out of the frying-pan into the fire, as they say, and I should never have had no more peaceful moments without her than now I must endure with her. Well-doing often lands you in a mess like that, and the one hope is to feel your reward is sure, though it can only come on the other side of the grave.

"My lord! To live with that mountainous woman!" I thought; and then I put everything but duty away from me and overtook her.

"You'll be Miss Jane Blight?" I said, lifting my hat to her, and for a moment she didn't see who 'twas; and then she did, and stood still. Her face turned several shades paler, and she put her hand to her heart and heaved, like a jelly, down to her boots. For a moment I thought she was going to faint and make a scene and block the sideway, but she gave a deep breath, and it steadied her a lot. Then she put her great hands on my shoulders, and said:—

"You're Noah Scobhull, or else his ghost!"

"The living man, Jane! And I've been looking for you for a fortnight, and I was going to advertise in the paper for you next Monday. It's in my pocket this moment. You've given me a lot of work you never did ought to have given me, Jane, and made a mystery where there was none. However, we must let bygones be bygones."

She looked me over, and I looked her over, and she saw a silver watch-chain, and a hard hat, and a silk tie, and other signs of prosperity; and I saw something strange about her, too—a sort of trim, nautical cut, you might say. She wore a serge skirt and jacket, and a seafaring cap over her mass of blazing red hair.

"You wanted me, then? You still wanted me, Noah?" she asked, and tears come in her eyes when she done so.

"Duty's duty, and a promise is a promise—when I make it, Jane," I replied. "The truth lies in a nutshell. I've come into a bit of money—very near three hundred a year I shouldn't wonder—and I remember my solemn word to you, though you have forgot yours to me, seemingly. And when I heard from the 'Coach' as you was gone, and no-

body could tell where, I thought that fifty to one you was in Plymouth at your old business and looking after your mother as before. And I was right, I suppose ? ''

" My mother's dead,'' she answered ; " and I ain't looking after nobody but myself. And my home, so to call it, be the sea nowadays. I'm a stewardess on the Weston-Smerdon packet-boat *Ladybird*, that trades across from Plymouth to Havre.''

" That accounts for your marine appearance, then ? '' I said.

" Yes, it do,'' she answered.

" You was always very given to the sea,'' I reminded her.

" Yes,'' she said, " I always was.''

She still quivered a bit from the waist upward, and her great eyes rolled about in a very helpless fashion. She'd made a hole in her manners, also, for she never whispered so much as a word of pleasure and gladness on my account after hearing about the fortune. Instead, she seemed to be full up with what was in her own mind.

" Fancy you remembering me all these donkey's years ! '' she said.

And then I got a thought niffed with the woman.

" And be I to understand you'd forgot me, Jane Blight ? '' I asked ; for no honest man is short of his proper pride.

" Forgot you ? No—'eaven's my judge, I haven't ! '' she answered. " You was always a kind and true friend, and we saw a good bit alike long ago. I mind you well enough, Noah, though to my eyes you look a few sizes smaller than when you was at the ' Coach.' ''

Well, I had my good manners, though she'd lost hers in the English Channel, seemingly. But I let slip a bit of satire, I'm afraid.

" I don't feel conscious of having shrunk, Jane,'' I answered, " and I'm afraid I can't return the compliment, anyway. The ocean appears to suit you very well.''

" It do,'' she replied, brightening up. " I'm a born sailor, Noah.''

" So did I ought to be,with a name like mine,'' I answered, striking a light note, though I didn't feel it ; " but I hate the deep, and was never on it but once, going round

Portland Bill in a pleasure steamer, and never again for me!"

She thought a moment, and then got an idea.

"If we go down to the 'Sextant' on the Barbican, you can give me a glass of sherry wine," she said, "and we can talk."

I followed her, and she went pretty fast and said but little on the way. What was to come I did not know; but, so far, I couldn't disguise from myself that Jane had a good bit on her mind besides me. And I wondered why she'd chose the "Sextant," which was merely a sailor's public-house somewhere down on the quay.

"You don't seem too pleased about our money, Jane," I said, just to break the silence, which was growing a bit unnatural between lovers joined again after three years and more.

"I'm very pleased indeed about it," she answered. "And never a man deserved a bit of luck better; and I shall be terrible interested to hear how you came to such a dollop of cash—an unlucky sort of chap like you."

"You're leaving Providence out," I said. "It was my Uncle Geoffrey, who left it to my father; and father and mother being dead, I get the lot—five thousand of the best, by all accounts."

"Fancy! Somehow I never thought your Uncle Geoffrey was a real man," replied Jane.

I said no more.

The "Sextant" was a small house on the Barbican, and Jane appeared to be well known there. We went into a little sitting-room off the private bar—her leading—and then I ordered a glass of sherry wine and a biscuit for her, and a half of stout for myself. She said a word to the maiden that served us, and I overheard it, though she didn't mean for me to do so.

"Has Mr. K. been in?" she asked; and the girl shook her head.

With that we sat down, and she took off her white thread gloves and cooled her face with a handkerchief.

"You've given me a turn, Noah!" she confessed. "They talk about the wonders of the ocean, but I reckon the sea's tame compared to the shore."

"And when do you sail next, if I may ask?" I inquired.

"Monday night, at half after nine," she answered.

"What if I forbid it, Jane?"

She finished her sherry wine at a gulp.

"I'll have one more," she said; "and you can't forbid it—me going to sea. I'm under orders, and have signed on."

"How soon can you sign off, then?" I asked, and rang the bell.

Jane began to shake again, and decided for a small brandy when the maiden answered me.

"I'm a wicked woman," she began, when we was alone again.

"Since when?" I asked.

"To think of you, so patient and faithful, and never forgetting me! To think all that time you could remember a poor soul like me! And now, shameful though it may sound to you, my dear man——"

What she was going to say I can't be certain, but she didn't say it, for at that moment a lumping great seafaring chap blew in, smoking a pipe. He was by way of being some sort of officer from his rig, and he knew Jane. In fact, 'twas clear he expected her, but equally clear he didn't expect me.

"Hello, Jane!" he said. "Who the——"

She introduced us.

"This is Mr. Sam Kitchen, Noah, the Second Engineer on the *Ladybird;* and this be Mr. Noah Scobhull, Sam—him—you remember."

"By jakes!" said the Second Engineer. "And what do he want down in these parts?"

"He wants me," said Jane, firmly enough, but not as if it gave her any great pleasure to mention it.

Mr. Kitchen was a six-foot man, with muscle and bone to match, and you could see that he breathed in a good bit of oil along of his profession. A big creation every way—big face, big beard, big voice.

"I'm hearing things," he said. "Perhaps you'll throw a ray of light, Jane?"

But, of course, so far as I was concerned, a rather hopeful ray of light had been throwed already. I rang the bell and asked Mr. Kitchen to give it a name, and when he'd got his

drop of unsweetened—for which he didn't thank me—he turned to Jane again and asked her to tune up.

"It's like this, Sam," she said. "Noah's the soul of honesty, and a straighter man never lived, and never will. All these years, while I'd thought that he'd forgot all about me, and imagined that I was a free woman, he'd done no such thing; but, on the contrary, always meant to keep me to my word as soon as ever he was in a position to give me a home. And now a rich uncle of his, what I never much believed in, has gone and died and left him a keg of beans, and the first thing he thought of was me. And he's been wearing out his boots for weeks tramping Plymouth on the chance of meeting me, and he was just off to advertise for me when he comes full steam upon my weather bow—me anchored afore a shop window at the time."

Mr. Kitchen rumpled his great beard, then he spat into a spittoon, knocked out his pipe, and began to load again.

"And what have you got to say, Mr. Scobhull?" he asked.

"What I've got to say ban't no great odds," I told him cheerfully. "I'll hear you, if you please, because in my judgment what you've got to say be like to settle the affair out of hand. But in any case, between gentlemen, we'll no doubt agree that the lady must be the first consideration."

"Money's a power, I see," murmured Jane. "You talk like a man with a bit of stuff behind you now, Noah."

"Money can do a lot," admitted the Second Engineer, "but it can't do some things, and I hope you'll take what I'm going to say in a friendly spirit, Mr. Scobhull. We're all called to face our troubles, and you've had your bit of good luck, seemingly; and now I'm afraid you're going to have a bit of darned bad luck!"

Jane pulled out her handkerchief—it was for her eyes this time—and Mr. Kitchen rang the bell.

"You'll have one with me now. Stout? Lucky man! I wish I could drink it, but me and Jane daren't touch malt liquor. 'Twould be lingering death to a beamy pair like us."

"Go on!" I said. "Why for do you talk about you and Jane Blight as 'a pair'?"

"That's the whole bitter fact," he explained. "When first I asked this woman to marry me—it was on her second voyage on the *Ladybird*—she told me your story, and I gave it all due weight. But in my judgment you were fairly ruled out by passage of time— and I told her so, and she was real thankful, because, as she said—being the soul of truth, as you no doubt know—that what she felt for you at the best, compared with what she now feels for me, is bilge to rum. Therefore I put it to you, that if you was to think to keep her to her first engagement, you'd be doing two things. You'd be breaking her heart—and I shouldn't reckon you was the kind of man who'd like to do that—and you'd be starting up a quarrel with me that would be very bad for your health afore it had gone far."

Of course my feeling was to grasp the Second Engineer's enormous hand and bless him, but I held in a bit longer and looked at Jane, and put on a very melancholy face. I remembered some play-acting I'd seen, where a good man yielded up a woman he loved and let another take her.

"And when did you think to be married?" I asked. "How far have you gone with this, Jane?"

"Michaelmas, or thereabout," declared Samuel. He rumpled in his beard and spat again. I never smelt nothing so horrible as his tobacco, though not very particular myself in that matter. Then silence fell among us.

I now hesitated between two courses. I could either tell 'em the truth, and say they'd let in light on my darkness and saved my soul alive, or else I could pretend I was going to make a great sacrifice for Jane's sake, and give her up, and live on with all the salt lost out of my life. And very like I should have done that, just for the pleasure of hearing 'em thank me, if it hadn't been for another and deeper thought. There was Aggie Bassett to be considered, and I felt pretty sure that when I told her I'd found Jane engaged to a marine engineer, and not wishful to come back to me or my fortune, she'd want proofs. Because, on the face of it, the Second in the *Ladybird's* engine-room weren't much to put up against a gentleman at large with his thousands at the bank.

So I done according and owned up.

"Well," I said, "then that lets me out, my dears, and

I'm very glad for you, and I'm very glad for myself. Love's love every time," I said, " and if Jane here feels that I'm no better than bilge to your rum, Mr. Kitchen, then there ain't going to be no bloodshed between you and me, I do assure you. I came for duty, not pleasure ; and though I shall always feel a very good friend to Jane—as I hope she will to me—still there's another woman. I won't say she fills my eye better than Jane, because Jane would make two of her, but I will say that I'd a long sight sooner marry her little finger than Jane's whole body. And now I've done my duty I shall go to my reward."

They were both much interested at this speech, and Samuel Kitchen went so far as to say he'd never met a higher-minded man than me.

" 'Twas a very fine thing to hunt for Jane under them circumstances," he said, " and I'm proud to know you, and I hope we shall be friends. And I wish you luck with your young woman, and so do Jane, I'm sure."

" That I do," promised Jane, " and I'd much like to meet her. I hope some day I shall, because I can tell her a few good things about you, Noah, you'd never tell her yourself."

" If you'll do that you can meet her to-morrow," I said. " And if you and your Second Engineer will take dinner with me, she shall be there. And we'll all drink to Providence, I'm sure. And now I shall cast about for a house out Mannamead way, if there's any there to let ; and so soon as Aggie Bassett can be free of her tobacconist's I shall certainly take her."

And it happened just so within the year, and better friends to us than Kitchen and his wife never was known.

Jane would have her first-born called Noah, after me, because I gave 'em a nice little wedding present of money, I may tell you ; and when Aggie, after two girls, had a very fine boy, we called him Samuel, after the Second Engineer. The man be First in a big cargo boat nowadays, but Jane have long since left the Merchant Marine and lives in a house down Stonehouse way.

MEET ME BY MOONLIGHT

MEET ME BY MOONLIGHT

THE house be a ruin now, as you see, and if you was to go in the door, you'd find a brave lot of nettles thigh-high in the house-place, and blackberries and nightshade, and ivy up the rotten walls, with a sapling or two of mountain ash making shift to grow overhead. For a house soon turns to a tumble-down wreck in our weather if there ban't watchful eyes and strong hands to look after it.

But a generation agone, Billy Burton, the water-keeper, lived there with his wife and his daughter. His job was to tramp the river bank that ran fifty yards from his door ; and so you might say work cried out to him morning, noon, and night. But he didn't hear it, because the man was so deaf as an adder, and had been from his twentieth year. A pretty bad fault in a water-keeper, or any other sort of man who be called to fight the poachers and see to game or fish ; but Billy made up for his ears by a wonderful pair of eyes. He could see so well in the dark as the day. At any rate, he swore he could, and he done things sometimes that looked as if it was true.

Hard by the weir he dwelt, with the big fir woods behind his house and the meadow in front ; then came Walla River, flowing down under Vixen Tor from her highways up over ; and in the flat meadow she bated of her mountain pace, and ran very deep and slow into King Fern Pool. Below it stretched the weir, and then opened out another pool, bigger than the first, by the name of Peel Pool, because 'twas a famous place for the fish, and is still so for that matter. Working up-stream they'd swim to the great apron of the weir ; and there weren't much of a ladder for 'em in those days, and often there'd be a proper swarm of the peel, cruising round and waiting for a fresh to fill the ladder and help them up to the higher reaches.

'Twas a place made for poachers, and that's why the Fishing Board had Billy on the spot; for his work was more by night than day. But a poacher likes the extra salt of danger in his fun, and for many of 'em 'tis the risk more than the game that draws 'em; and so it was with Billy's greatest enemy. 'Twas a battle between a bear and a fox you might say, and Burton always swore that once he got to grips with young Warrender Toms nought would save the chap.

But the Law's the Law, and Toms knew it quite so well as Billy, and though everybody well understood that Warrender was busy as a bee on the river, not Burton, nor yet Jack Woolcombe, the under-keeper, had ever catched him red-handed, nor found a fin upon the man. And the Law ordains that if you can't swear you've seed a chap kill, nor yet found feathers, fur, or fish upon him, you'd best to leave him alone.

Folk said as how Warrender Toms must have ate fern seeds, which, according to the old tale, make you invisible, for though a big, young fellow, both tall and broad-shouldered, no man had ever catched him at his fun by noon or night. A clean-shaped, bold-eyed rascal with a front of brass, and so good-natured, away from his wickedness, that the women wouldn't hear much against him. He lived with his mother at Horrabridge, and said he was a platelayer on the Great Western Railway; but it weren't many plates he'd laid, I reckon; night-lines was more to his taste, and what he didn't know of snaring game-birds and killing heavy fish weren't worth knowing. He'd larned his tricks from "Moleskin," a famous poacher now gone to his doubtful reward. His friends were at Plymouth and Tavistock, and he always got away with it by one hazard or another; but in truth he poached more for the joy of poaching, than the cash, because his dead father—a most respectable and respected man—had saved up a tidy fortune at a down country farm, and Mrs. Toms let lodgings in the season and also did very clever with her bees.

But Dartmoor was steadily getting too hot to hold Warrender, and there came a time when a proper dead set was made at him, by parson, by Mrs. Toms herself,

and a good few well-wishers beside, to clear out and try Canada, or some such spacious place, where he could do man's work and have plenty of honest sport also.

And his mother, though she felt plaguey sorry to lose him, because he was her all, yet went at him, in season and out, to be gone, before he took his pitcher to the well once too often and got into trouble and brought disgrace on an honourable name.

He played with the thought for a bit, and then, much to the surprise and thankfulness of all concerned, he decided to go.

'Twas Billy Burton who brought the news home to his wife and child, and Mrs. Burton thanked the Lord, and so did her daughter, Alice; but the water-keeper appeared a bit sorry himself.

"I've been after the rip for five years," he said, "and I've always swore that I'd take him soon or late."

"Please God he'll make good out foreign," said Mrs. Burton on her fingers, which Billy could read like a book; but he shook his head.

"He ban't born to make good," he said, "he'm a lost man, whether or no, and if he don't see the inside of clink in this country, it will be another."

"You'll miss him," signalled his daughter, Alice, laughing as she twiddled out the words on her fingers.

"I shall," admitted her father. "And this I'll say: I'd have got him afore long if he'd bided. I've larned his ways pretty clever by now. 'Twas only a question of time, and I may land the young devil yet, for he ain't going till Christmas. Wants a few more peel and pheasants this fall, I reckon!"

Alice laughed and hoped her father would fail, for though she only knew Toms by sight, like most of the other females her ideas about game and sporting was foggy, and she never could see a poacher in his true colours. And then, not above a week later, a strange thing happened and a chance, harmless meeting altered the level run of a good few lives. For that matter most strange things that happen to humans spring from a meeting at first.

Alice Burton was a fine enough maid, not a beauty by a long way—too like her father for that—but a big, bowerly

sort of woman with a full figure and a kind face, though it was brick red. She had a something about her that took the men more than prettiness; for she liked 'em and was interested in 'em; and a woman that likes and befriends the men, and shows a womanly pleasure in their company, can always get a husband, though she may be so plain as a milestone. 'Tisn't art neither, 'tis nature in 'em. That sort be women to their dying day; while such a lot of the pretty ones never be women at all really, but only females without no pleasure in the males—like the working bees.

Alice had her adventures, of course, and a good few chaps wanted her; but only one—a widow man with five children—ever made her think twice. He was a very snug man, too—a farmer down Meavy way; but her father set dead against it, and the man made a slip in his courting and hinted to Alice that it would be a good lift up for her; and that stung her pride, and so it came to nought.

She was heart-whole without a doubt till a day she went up the river in late August to pick sloan; because her mother happened to be very clever with sloe-gin and bottled the fruit before it was ripe. And there were certain brakes, beside Walla, where amazing fine sloes so big as damsons grew; Alice had heard about 'em from her father, and nobody else knew about 'em. So she went with her basket by a rough riverside path above Huckworthy Bridge, and forced her way through a thicket or two, and then took off her shoes and stockings and crossed the river to the blackthorn trees where they spread in a lonesome coomb. The river ran hid here under dwarf willow, and so the fishermen gave it a miss for half a mile, because you couldn't throw a fly. But 'twas a very fine spot for heavy trout, just because no regular fishermen ever touched it; and nobody knew that better than Warrender Toms.

Alice fetched across, sat down on the spine grass at river's brink, pulled on her stockings again, and began to sing to herself, for she had a voice like a bird and was the mainstay of the woman's side of the church choir. But she hadn't sung above a dozen notes when, not ten yards off, a man's head popped up from the willows, and there was

Toms grinning at her. It seemed as if he'd rose up out of the earth, and she gasped and dragged on her stockings and shut her mouth and glowered at the man.

"Don't stop," he says, "'tis lovely, Miss Burton. And if anything could make me go to church, which nothing could, 'twould be to hear you putting the grey birds to shame."

She waited till she'd got her shoes on, and then she answered him.

"You be poaching!" she said.

"What's that?" he asked. "Don't know as ever I heard the word. I was just tempting a trout or two down under the brambles, because the gentlemen never fish here—too difficult for 'em; but if you use a stone-fly and keep hid and dap clever, 'tis wonderful what even a simple soul like me can do. I suppose it wouldn't be no use offering you a nice half-pounder?"

Alice eyed him and couldn't but admire the handsome scamp.

"You'm the wickedest rip on the river, and well you know it," she said.

"And you'm the finest woman on the river, and well everybody knows it," he answered.

She eyed him thoughtful-like.

"And where might you be going come Christmas?" she asked; but he didn't answer immediate. He climbed up out of the willows and wound a line off his walking-stick and put the line in his pocket.

"Your father be gone down the river this morning," he said, "and Jacky Woolcombe is on holiday, so us shan't be worried. And I'll ask you a hugeous favour, Miss Burton."

"I don't grant wicked rascals no favours," she answered.

"I should hope not," he said. "There's only one man on this earth will ever have the proud joy of winning the leastest favours from you, or doing favours for you, or working his fingers to the bone for you and praising the Lord for his luck; and that's the happy man as will win you."

He sat down a good few yards from her and took his pipe out of his pocket.

"I'll wish you good afternoon," said Alice, and made to go.

"Wait half a minute," he begged her. "I've no right to scrape acquaintance, but I'll soon be a goner, and I well know you're too kind-hearted a girl to deny a lonely chap half-a-dozen words. I'd have made bold to come afore you a year ago and more than that; but I feared Mr. Burton wouldn't allow it."

"For very good reasons."

"From his point of view it is so; though, if I could only get a friend to speak for me, I believe such a fine man might see he was wrong here and there. 'Tis a case of give a dog a bad name and hang him, between me and your father. But the fearful difficulty is that I can't speak to him. I'd learn the deaf and dumb alphabet if only I thought he'd let me talk on my fingers to him; but too well I know he never would."

"You can't know nothing of the sort," said Alice. "There's nobody kinder or more reasonable than my dear father. No honest man ever fell out with him."

"I'm sure of that; and if you'll sit down here for two minutes, you'll be doing a Christian act; because it may be in your power to put me right with him afore I go. I don't want to leave an enemy in the old country, Miss Alice."

He looked so fine and seemed so down-daunted and crestfallen that she smiled. To see such a terror as Toms so troubled about enemies amused the woman a good bit, because nobody was quicker at taking up a joke than her.

"If you don't like enemies, the simplest way is not to make 'em," she said.

"God's truth! But sometimes you can't help it. There's a lot of jealousy in Horrabridge."

"Nobody's jealous of you, I reckon."

"Oh yes, they are! Do sit down on that stone for half a minute. And when I've smoked my pipe I'll help you to pick sloan."

"How d'you know I've come here to pick sloan?" she asked.

"'Tis the only thing you could come for—unless perhaps for a trout or two."

She shook her head.

"I don't go poaching," she said, and slipped down on the stone he'd pointed to.

"You don't go anywhere," he answered. "You hide your light under a bushel a darned sight too much, if you ask me. Such a woman as you ought to be at every revel and merrymaking for miles round; and instead of that——"

"You mind your own business," she told him. "That's what you axed me to stop and listen to, though seeing what you make your business—however, I hope in Canada you'll stand to work, Mr. Toms; and when your mother can tell us all you're doing well and going straight out there, then you may be sure your enemies will turn into friends here."

"A very witty thought indeed," he answered her. "You never said a cleverer word, though made of cleverness, as we all know."

And so they chattered—Alice trying to keep the talk to him and his future, and him turning the talk to her and her future. It was one of them cases where like met like and woke liking. For half-an-hour they sat; then the girl jumped up and asked aloud what the mischief she was doing; and he said that she was healing a fellow-Christian's wounds, and so on. Then he helped her with the sloe berries, and did deeds of daring and soon heaped her basket; and then he wanted to take her basket and she let him; and then he asked her if it would be any convenience to her if he carried her over to her own side of the river, and she said it would not and wondered he'd got the face.

Well, that was the start of it, and the man hardly understood till a few days after, all the adventure had meant to him; but the woman was a darned sight quicker, as women often are in that matter, and she knew exceeding well afore she went to sleep that night what Warrender Toms might mean to her. It weren't his face, nor yet his cheek, nor yet anything to name, but just the something about him unlike every other man—the way of looking at life and the way of looking at her. Because, for all his nerve and clear sight and power of standing up to every created human being, she had seen easy enough that

she'd made a tremendous mark on the man and got him guessing half-a-dozen times with her sharp answers. He'd lost his confidence as she'd gained hers; he'd dropped his don't-care-a-damn manner before they parted; and he spoke less and less towards the finish and listened to her, as if she was wisdom made alive and telling the last word on every subject.

She felt all this, but weren't proud of it, only terrible fluttered and interested; because, though she'd hid her feelings a lot cleverer than Warrender, she couldn't hide 'em from herself; and when, at the finish, before he left her, he asked, so humble as a drowned worm, if she might be picking sloan by good chance a week later at the same spot, she thought twice before she answered him. Then she spoke.

"You're known for a bad lot with the men," she said, "and if you was known for a bad lot with the women, I wouldn't have nought to do with you; but us haven't got nothing against you to my knowledge."

"And never will have," he said. "And as to being a bad lot, 'tis all the point of view. And if you'll come to the willows any day or night convenient to yourself, this I'll promise: I won't touch the fish. And more than that; if you commanded I was never to touch 'em again, I don't say but what I might not even promise that."

She shook her head.

"Don't you promise too much, else you'll add lies to all your other crimes, I expect. And—and—Wednesday I shall be picking berries if weather's fair."

"What hour?"

"Three o'clock or thereabout."

"I'll be there if alive."

"Don't you get locked up in the meantime then."

So it started, and so it went on; and being young and without anything to come between, they unfolded their natures to each other pretty soon, and Alice found herself in love with the young man; and, of course, he only lingered between whiles and didn't really live unless he was along with her. He'd never fallen in love afore and was soon in the stage when she could lead him on a daisy-chain if need be, and he stopped some of his games at her orders, and

presently, after a month of their secret meetings, he offered for her, and she was in his arms.

He still wanted to leave England and take her with him ; but she over-persuaded him in that matter, because she was very fond of her parents and felt Billy would suffer too much if she was took from him. And, with her woman's cleverness, she showed Warrender how it might be a tower of strength for him, when it came to the business of tackling his future father-in-law, if he agreed, for Billy's sake, to bide in England, so as Alice should never be far from her parents' home.

He agreed to that, and he also reckoned the first thing to do would be to find worthier work than plate-laying ; while, of course, he promised, by every far-reaching oath he could lay his tongue to, that never again would he touch fish or game. In fact, his own idea was to find work as a gamekeeper, and with the usual confidence of youth, he reckoned that, thanks to his wide experience, he'd make a passing good one.

Warrender's mother heard about it first, and she was feared of her life and wept buckets over Alice Burton, when she came to see her, and reckoned that no power on earth would ever make old Billy agree.

" If there weren't another man in the world, he'd never look at Warrender for you," she said. " And the only chance of it is for my son to turn over a new leaf first, and lead a new life for a good twelve months, and clear his name, and be seen to worship o' Sunday, and stand to work the rest of the week. And then, after a year of it, he might come acquainted with you and have the face to offer ; but 'tis going to take a good, long twelve months of righteousness at the least for Mr. Burton to trust and forgive the past. And even forgiveness is but the first step to winning his leave to court his only child."

So she talked sense, which was the last thing either of 'em had any use for at the moment, because, though made of sense by nature, Alice was in love and saw the world upside down just then ; and Warrender, though clever and far-seeing enough when planning wickedness, now that he was death on Alice and a good deed, had no patience left. In fact, the thought of waiting a year for her seemed the

dream of an idiot, and he went so far as to say his mother was a frozen old zany to talk such rubbish.

So they took the law into their own hands, according to custom, and it was arranged that Warrender should write to Mr. Burton, for he was a very nice penman among his other clevernesses, and ask the water-keeper to give him an appointment to talk over a matter of business, with Mrs. Burton to spell out his words on her fingers so as Billy could get 'em. And he done so; and Alice planned that on the night after Billy got his letter—a night in late September—she would come out and meet Toms by the river and tell him how her father took the idea.

But for weeks before that Warrender had not been idle. He'd given out a good bit about himself in the public-house bars, and let the people hear of his intentions to stop home and get work; and so it had come round to Billy Burton, through Jack Woolcombe, the under-keeper, who'd larned the deaf and dumb alphabet, that master Toms was going to do wonderful things. He brought the news to his house, and told Alice and her mother at dinner one Sunday.

"The anointed rip have changed his plans seemingly, and be throwing dust in the eyes of the people," he said. "He bain't going abroad, but means to bide here, like a thorn in my thumb; but he's given out he's through with poaching for good and all; and he wants a gamekeeper's job! The sauce of the rascal—and when he's in regular work he's going to settle down and seek a wife!"

"It sounds good," signalled Mrs. Burton, who was always hopeful for the young.

"A damned sight too good to be true!" swore the old chap. "I wish I thought he meant half, or a quarter of it, and God help the mad maiden as would trust him to keep a roof over her head! But us'll see what he's doing a year hence—doing time most likely! 'Tis all a blind, because he knows the time for the pheasants is drawing near, and the pheasants this year be a wonder."

"You ought to feel glad of his high resolves, father," spoke Alice on her big hands.

"The leopard can't change his spots, my dear. If there was only one peel left in the river, Toms wouldn't

rest till he'd catched it ; and if there was only one hare on Ringmore Down, he'd give the creature no peace till he'd shot it. Wait and watch, I shall ; and I mean to watch sharper than usual, I promise 'e. Poach that man must, just as another man must drink, or another do his duty."

And presently came the letter, and though 'twas a very unusual affair for Billy Burton to get such a thing, he kept shy about it and didn't satisfy Alice, nor yet her mother. He read it when he came in for his breakfast, and put it in his pocket without a word ; and when his wife, thinking no harm inquired of him what it was about, he only said he didn't know and didn't want to. He went on, however, about another matter, and carried the war into the enemy's country, for something he'd heard not half-an-hour before he came home, taken with the letter from Toms, made him a good bit suspicious. And just as Alice was wishing she'd got something to tell Warrender when they met that night, she suddenly found she would have something to tell him, and something a long way short of pleasant. For her father rounded on her sharp and spoke in words she'd never heard from his lips before that hour.

It came out that Jack Woolcombe, unknown to Alice and her sweetheart, had seen the man and maid together and spied on 'em. The under-keeper was a very good, straight chap and had no thought to make mischief—far from it. His only wish was to save trouble and keep Burton's girl out of it. And sharing Billy's opinion of Toms, he reported all he'd seen. What Alice heard, therefore, weren't many words, but bitter clear sense.

" It have come to me that you've got acquainted with Warrender Toms," said Billy, " and I'll thank you to get unacquainted again so quick as you mind to. 'Twas a mean and base thing, Alice, to meet the man behind my back and let your father's worst enemy dare to talk to you ; but since you could sink to such a beastly act, I'll say this : If I hear more of it, I'll turn you out of my house and never grant you be daughter of mine again ; and I'd a long sight sooner see you dead in your coffin afore you had any truck with that hateful rogue and blackguard."

He went out afore she could gather her wits to answer

him ; but her mother took up the tale, and Alice very soon saw something had got to be done about it pretty swift.

She had the coast clear for meeting Warrender that night, because her father was away for a meeting of the Fishery Board at Tavistock the same evening and wouldn't be back till after noon the next day ; but, even so, things didn't fall out very comfortable or fit in very well. She and her mother went to bed as usual, and she was just lying waiting for half-past eleven to come and watching the moonlight creep across the blind, when Mrs. Burton called her, and she ran across to her mother's room and found the old woman took bad. She'd been queer before supper, and the shock of hearing Alice stick up for Warrender Toms in their long argument and the terror of what would come of such a disaster proved too much for her. She'd got the spasms, which were a common trouble with her, and nothing would do but for Alice to rise up and go into the village to the doctor and fetch a bottle of physic for her. It weren't above half-past ten o'clock and the girl didn't feel very much put about, for she wasn't due to meet Warrender till midnight. So she rayed herself and set off through the wood, little dreaming she'd never see her mother no more. Yet so it was by the will of God, and that peaceful autumn night, with the harvest moon shining and the river running so clear as glass, saw a very fearful affair.

It happened like this. Alice hadn't been gone above twenty minutes when Warrender Toms came along to the river a good bit before his hour and, all unknown to the young man, a pair of eyes so keen as a fox's was on him from the first moment he arrived. He meant to take the punt that always lay in the tail of Peel Pool for Billy's use and with that he would soon have got across to the side where keeper's cottage stood, and wait for Alice till the appointed time ; but a heavy fish rose right under the bank whereon he walked, and great, moving rings widened out on the still water ; and that was too much for Warrender Toms. His mind ran on so quick as lightning, and thanking his luck there weren't no rods out, for peel fishing be a night sport, he reckoned to pass the time before his sweetheart came by killing a fish or two, then hiding 'em and

taking 'em away after she was gone. His promise to her —to poach no more—had only been words and meant nothing in his mouth. And now he fetched a fork out of his pocket—a three-pronged steel thing—and unscrewed the ferrule of his walking-stick and screwed in the fork. Then he crept to the water and got the moon off it, so he could see what was moving, and afore long marked his fish lying under the bank. He was an old hand at the game and took his time; but when he did let drive he made no mistake, and half-an-hour after he started there was a twelve-pound peel on the bank instead of in the water.

Too busy he was to heed any danger, and for that matter, the noise another man made creeping near and nearer to him through the thickets behind the fisherman's path, would never have reached the sharpest ear, because of the steady thunder of the weir. So he killed his fish and laid it but twenty feet from the hidden watcher; and then he ordained to get one more if he could, for Alice weren't due for near an hour yet.

And Billy Burton grinned in the bushes and thanked the Lord for delivering Toms into his hands at last. He itched to be on to the man, well knowing that, once his arms were round Warrender, there'd be no escape till he'd thrown him. Because Billy was a wrestler from the olden time and didn't fear of the result once he got in holds with a chap three stone lighter than himself. The old boy hadn't gone to Tavistock, and he said afterwards that there had come into his mind a voice that hammered at him to keep hid close to home that night and watch by his own pools. It was a voice that didn't want no ear to reach him through; but it spoke inside his head so clear as a bell and wouldn't be denied. And he had obeyed it and now waited for his reward.

He knew nothing about the meeting to come with his girl, and guessed she and her mother were in bed and asleep long afore; but he did know that Warrender meant to kill another fish if no more, and he made ready next time he came up from the water to leap upon him and grip him afore he could bolt. So he crawled beside the dead peel and then got in the shadow of a rock, where he could jump straight for t'other; and if he broke Warrender's back

when he felled him, it weren't going to trouble Billy overmuch.

So there was Toms, busy as a bee, after another peel, and Billy, grim as a ghost, waiting for him to come along, and Alice hastening back through the woods by the river with the bottle of physic, fretting for her mother's spasms and wondering if Warrender was on the way.

The boat floated in its place t'other side of the pool, and the maiden, seeing it, felt glad as he hadn't got there afore her ; but mighty soon she found he had, for suddenly there broke out an uproar louder than the waterfall, and looking across the river, she faced a sight that made her heart leap in her bosom and her feet shake under her.

For Toms had killed his second fish all right, and just as he laid it beside the other, like a tiger out of the dark, Billy sprang. The younger had heard his rush, however, and braced himself to withstand the shock, and now they was fairly in grips struggling like two black men under the white of the moon.

Toms was cowed from the start, no doubt, for he knew that, even if he escaped, it would be a policeman's job in the morning and the end of his fun for many a long day ; but the lust of battle got in him, for he could wrestle too, and there's no disgrace at that sport for young and old to meet in it, and the strength of youth be pitted against the experience and cleverness of age.

So they battled and growled and cussed like a couple of fighting dogs ; and Alice, standing on the other side of the weir, shrieked to 'em for God's love to part, else they'd both be in the river and drowned in each other's arms. And Toms heard, but of course her father did not. His back was turned to the water, so he couldn't see his daughter neither.

Then the terrified girl, not stopping to think, reckoned she might part 'em if she could only reach across, and forgetting the danger, she started along the top of the weir, where it ran shallow over timbers above the brink of the fall. The water weren't very high, and she remembered fetching safely across once a few years before when she was a girl ; but a dangerous deed by day was madness by night, and Toms yelled to her to go back for the love of God, and tried to make her father understand what was

happening. But Billy heard nothing ; he only held on and tightened his grip and reckoned he would have the younger man on his head in a minute or two.

And very soon he did, in truth, for afore she was half across, Alice slipped upon the wood under the water beneath her feet, and she was over and gone like a moonbeam into the foam beneath. And Toms, in his agony, forgot what he was doing and was felled in a moment, smash on his back, with Billy on his chest like a bear grinning in his face and the girl drowning behind 'em !

Sharp wages for sin you might say—her lost in the water and old man's fifteen stone squatted on the young man's body. But Warrender's brain worked all the time, of course, and he judged the only trick was to pretend to be down and out. So he rolled his head on one side and lolled out his tongue and loosed his arms and tried to look so limp as a dead man. He sold Billy there, and reckoning him unconscious if no worse, the keeper lifted off him to crow out his great victory. But the instant moment he rose clear to look at the insensible man, like an eel Toms gathered himself, leapt outside t'other's arm, and in three strides was over the bank and into the river.

Then Burton was just hollering at him that it would be all one in the morning, when he saw a strange sight and watched his enemy wade breast-deep, then swim a few strokes to something shining in the moonlight upon the black water outside the foam of the fall. He was three-parts across by then, and Burton saw him grab the thing and land with it, and then pick it up in his arms and carry it to his house. With that the terrible truth got into him, and he ran down to the boat and poled across and came home—just in time to meet his wife at the door and Toms holding the girl.

The younger man didn't bide. He explained to Alice's mother that she'd fallen into the water while he was fighting with Billy ; then he said he'd go for doctor and was off. And for all his hard work, he ran faster than he'd ever ran afore. But horror often falls atop of horror in such a queer way that when Warrender, dripping as he was, stood by old Dr. Westcott's door and thundered at the knocker, it looked for a minute as if he was only going to get words for his trouble. For doctor had gone to bed. He was suffering

a raging rheumatism himself at the minute, and poor Alice had already had him down once to make the medicine for her mother. 'Twas Mrs. Westcott that oped the window up above and snapped out to Toms that her husband was ill himself and couldn't budge no more that night for nobody; but Warrender shouted her down very quick.

"'Tis life or death, ma'am," he said. "Miss Burton's falled in the river and be dead to the world, and nought but doctor can save her, and if he don't come 'tis murder whether or no."

"He's got out of his warm bed for Alice Burton once already," Mrs. Westcott answered him, "and——"

But old Westcott had heard Toms roaring through the open window, and was already dragging himself into his clothes with grunts and groans.

"Tell the man to go into the stable and fetch out my pony and saddle him," he said. "A life's a life, but it's little likely I'll be in time now."

Mrs. Westcott obeyed, and Toms, who knew the place, soon had the doctor's fat pony waiting for him.

The old chap creaked downstairs on his wife's arm, and Warrender got him on his steed and ran beside him. He was a sight himself, bloody about the face, where he'd fallen with his head in a fuzz bush, and streaming wet; but he told doctor all there was to it as they went forward, and the old man forgot his own aches, though he reckoned 'twas more than he could do to save the poor maiden now. And he was right. Alice lay so cold as a stone and unconscious still when he got to her, and her mother was trying to force brandy in her mouth and her father strove to make her catch heat by rubbing of her. But they didn't know nothing about the rules to make a drowned woman's lungs get to work; so doctor set to and pumped away at the poor thing's arms, and did all his skill and larning could do.

For an hour he worked and bided there for another half-hour while Billy and his wife toiled to fetch the blessed life back to their only one; but 'twas all vain; the woman had gone. And the parents were so mazed-headed as a pair of sheep about it, and Billy raged for Warrender's blood, and his wife fainted on top of her dead daughter.

Dr. Westcott, in torture himself, stopped along with them till daylight; then he went out into the first shiver of morning, and there was Toms, holding his pony and waiting to hear the fatal news.

He said nought, but helped doctor on to his little nag, and led it through the wood. Then he went home, ate his breakfast, put on his best clothes, and gave himself up at the police-station just ten minutes before Billy arrived with his fearful tale.

Warrender Toms had changed from youth to middle-age afore he went afore the justices. He'd told his story quite clear and straight afore that, and explained how it was owing to Burton's deafness that he couldn't make him understand what had fallen out behind his back and so reach the maiden in time. He got six months hard, and he wouldn't have troubled if he'd got twenty years; and when he came out, he went foreign and won't never see England no more. He always told Alice Burton she would turn him into a straight man; and though 'tis doubtful if she'd have succeeded in life, in death she done it without a doubt. He's in sight of fifty year old now, and have got a wife and two grown-up sons in Canada.

He was my nephew, you understand, and I'm the last of his family left to home, and he writes me one letter a year, which I can see to read without specs still, though eighty-six years, two months. His mother be under the daisies long since, and so is Billy; but Mrs. Burton scrapes about the village yet, and doctor, he's still living by all accounts.

They tell me he's to Torquay by the sea, creeping around with the other old blue-bottles there, and waiting for the first frost to pinch him off.

THE PROPHECY

THE PROPHECY

CHARLES FORDE saw his neighbour, Thomas Finch, walking up the garden path of "Oatlands," and braced himself for an exceedingly painful interview. Because Mr. Finch was betrothed to the elder man's only daughter, and within the past four-and-twenty hours Jenny Forde had changed her mind and decided, after an engagement of six months, that Tom Finch, of "Five Elms," was not the man for her.

She could offer no decent excuse for this defection and her father knew it. Mr. Finch farmed his own land and enjoyed a reputation for good sense and good fortune. His record was untarnished, his prospects excellent, his health good. A dark, clean shaven man of character, he had courted Jenny and won her without difficulty. He loved her heartily and had proved a generous and kindly sweetheart; yet now, within three months of marriage, the young woman decided that nothing on earth would make her marry Tom. She lacked the pluck to tell him herself, and her widowed father, after protesting indignantly and striving for three days to convince the wayward maid that she was doing a wicked thing, found her obstinacy proof against every argument.

She offered no sane reasons—a fact that made Mr. Forde's task the more difficult; and in the approaching interview his sympathies were entirely with Thomas. Nor did he disguise the fact when Finch appeared.

"Come in the pleasure garden out o' the way, Tom," began Charles. "I'm in a lot of trouble. That's why for I asked you to step over."

"I take it kindly that you should," answered the younger. "If I, as be going to be your son-in-law at Michaelmas, can't help you in a hitch, 'tis pity."

"Two difficulties I be in," said Farmer Forde, "and one is nought, but t'other looks like the worst come-along-of-it

as I've been called to face since my wife died. Will you have a spot of whisky?"

"No, thank you, not of a morning. What's the trouble then?"

"First, my cowman's leaving—after ten years. My right hand you may say; and now he's a fancy as Dartmoor ban't suiting his breathing parts, and be going down to the in-country. A proper disaster in its way, for such a cowman I don't count to see again."

"Fancy Amos off! You do surprise me. But if that be nothing to t'other disaster, then it must be fearsome bad, Charles."

"So 'tis, Tom; and what's more, you're in it. I'm properly out of sorts about the thing, and it's knocked ten year off my life, as I powerfully believe. In a word, Jenny ain't going to marry you, my dear. I've talked my throat sore and used pretty harsh language, too, as well I might; but she be dead to honour and justice and every damn thing; and 'tis my cruel task to tell you, because she haven't got the face."

Mr. Finch breathed heavily through his nose, and his dark eyes grew very hard.

"This is what her airs and graces of late have meant, then," he said. "I've known there was something in the wind this longful time, Charles Forde; and I was patient, as becomes a man with a female. And why have she done this outrageous act, if I may ax?"

"You may ax, same as I did, a hundred times, Tom; but whether you'll get an answer be to see. In a word, all she'll say is that it have been borne in upon her, so fierce as sunrise, that she must marry a fair man. A fair man or none it have got to be, and her 'inner soul'—that's what she calls it—her 'inner soul'—tells her that the man she takes will be the flaxen sort. Another kind would spell failure."

"And that's all the reason for throwing me over after six months' tokening and about two years' courting?"

"'Tis too shameful for words, and if she weren't my one and only, I'd turn her out of the house for it," declared the master of "Oatlands." "But there it stands, and I'll swear you ain't much more put about than me."

Mr. Finch was silent for some moments, and the father

of the faithless girl ran his hand through his scanty hair, pulled his whiskers, and sighed heavily.

Then Thomas asked a question.

"And what about my presents, master?"

"They be all here in this parcel," answered Mr. Forde. "You'll find 'em to the leastest, Tom. Everything be done decently and in order, for that matter."

"'Decently'! Your daughter don't know the meaning of the word," answered Finch. "I ban't going to blow nor bluster, nor make any sort of fuss; because to do so would be to waste steam and leave me so much the worse off. And I ban't going to say I'm not cruel shocked and disappointed neither. I am. This is such a disaster as I couldn't have thought would have overtook a straight and simple man like me."

"You've a right to see her if you want, Tom. I told her that."

"I do not want. If she could do this in cold blood, for no honest reason on earth, then I don't want to see her again. And I don't want to think of her neither. It beggars belief and be contrary to nature, though doubtless not contrary to woman's nature. She's a wicked girl, Charles, and her heart be in the wrong place, and God help the flaxen man when he comes along—that's all I've got to say about it."

Mr. Finch rose and prepared to go his way.

"You've took it like the fine chap you are, Tom; and I hope to God you won't let this catastrophe come between me and you. I've been your friend since you growed up, and your father's friend afore you, and I'd rather have cut off this hand than let such a fearful blow come upon you from any one of my name."

"I believe you. I don't feel no different to you. I'm sorry you should have such a woman as a daughter. Now I'll be gone."

He took his presents, which made rather a bulky parcel, put on his hat, and went his way, while a pair of eyes as dark as his own, but not as straight, watched him depart from a dormer window in the thatch above.

A moment or two later Jenny Forde joined her father, who gloomily filled his pipe.

She was a slim, good-looking girl of twenty-five with a face rather lacking in expression. She had indeed no particular characteristics, save vanity and ignorance, and the folly she had now committed arose from another foolish act in the recent past. Unknown to her parent, or sweetheart, Jenny allowed a gipsy to tell her fortune at a revel, and learning from the "wise woman" that she must wed a fair man, who would come to her and court her in disguise, the prospect of a romance so attractive induced her change of mind. For the gipsy had once predicted smooth things to a bosom friend of Jenny's, and something so like the prophecy actually happened to this maiden a year afterwards, that Miss Forde herself sought the prophetess at the next opportunity. She was now quite determined to accept the old woman's promises, even at the expense of her own good name and character for sense.

"How did it go?" she asked.

"You hard devil!" answered Jenny's father. "What do you care how it's gone? He's took it like the man he is."

"And took his presents also, I see."

"Certainly. Why for not? You wouldn't have had the face to sport his fal-lals no more, I should think, after you'd put it across him this way. He was sorry for himself, that life had brought him such a facer, and he was sorry for me, because I'd got such a bad-hearted creature for a daughter."

"And he might have been sorry for me, too, I should think. A fine woman and a clever woman like me, don't do such a thing for nought. I was sorry enough to turn him down, wasn't I? But you can't help your feelings and convictions; and once I got properly fixed in my mind that I must wed a fair man, or none, I couldn't go on with Tom Finch—in justice to him. If you find you've stopped loving a man, you've got to say so, haven't you? And no sensible man wants to love a woman that don't love him.

They wrangled to no purpose, and Jenny declared herself hardly treated and misunderstood. But in reality she experienced nothing but a sense of secret relief that the matter had come to an end. She was not built to feel deeply, but she was built to pretend cleverly, and Mr. Finch had certainly believed that she cared for him and could not fail to make a valuable and whole-hearted wife.

A week passed, and the news ran through Ponsworthy hamlet that Jenny Forde had changed her mind about Tom Finch. The sensation lasted a second week, and those who did not admire Mr. Finch—being induced to disparage him by reason of his prosperity—were not sorry; while his friends declared him well out of a stupid mating, for they argued that Miss Forde must be a fool to jilt the best man she was ever likely to win; and no man desires to marry a fool.

Then, while Jenny's father was forgetting this unfortunate incident, before the growing problem of his new cowman, a cowman appeared. It wanted but a fortnight to the withdrawal of the invaluable Amos, and his master began to despair of the right man, when a light shone through the gloom, and a most admirable and accomplished person offered his services. He came armed with excellent credentials; he proved of amiable disposition and invincible good nature, and he was, as Charles Forde could not fail to note, about the most strikingly handsome man he had seen in his life.

Samuel Pascoe was eight-and-twenty. He stood six feet high, and chance had willed that his features should be cast in classic mould. There was something Greek in his open, clear-cut face, beautiful mouth, and round chin. His eyes were grey and lustrous, his forehead broad, his corn-coloured hair close and curly.

Having read an excellent account of Samuel, and learned farther that he had fought in the war, which was an essential in Mr. Forde's opinion, he examined him on the subject of his business and found him well versed in it.

"You seem to know so much about cows as a man of your age can be expected to know," admitted the farmer, "and your papers are all they should be. No encumbrances, neither?"

"None whatever," declared the youth.

"You want ten shilling a week more than what I'd hoped to pay, however."

"I reckon you'll find I'm worth it, master," said Samuel. "Your ten cows won't take me all my time. I like horses, too, though I don't pretend to know much about 'em inside. But I can plough and I be fond of ploughing."

"Come, then, and us'll see how we get on," decided the master of "Oatlands." "You ban't too nice for the rough and tumble, I hope?" he added. "You look a bit of a gentleman, and us ain't got no use for nothing like that."

Samuel Pascoe laughed.

"It's only army ways," he said. "You get in the fashion of washing and shaving and being smart—all good things on a farm, or anywhere."

"Very true indeed," admitted the elder. "I've a great belief in washing, and have preached it to deaf ears all my life. If you can stand to work, I don't care how clean you be, nor yet what you wear."

So Mr. Pascoe took up his new duties, and two months later Charles confessed to Tom Finch that he was worth his money.

"It shows, if that wanted showing, that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," he declared. "I never thought to better Amos, yet here's a man so ready and willing as ever he was, and cleverer, along of education. A proper treasure in fact."

"Without a doubt he is," replied the younger farmer. "A very understanding chap and nice in his speech and the best-looking beggar—bar none—that ever I saw. He comes in to me for a tell now and then, and he's cured my piebald cow of her bad heel—a thing I never hoped for."

They expatiated on the virtues of Samuel and then Mr. Forde ventured a word concerning Jenny.

"Forgive a painful subject," he said. "Nought but friendship and my deep respect for you makes me speak of it, Tom. I hope you be recovering very well from your cruel shock? With all my heart I hope it."

"I am," answered Finch calmly. "I am recovering, because what you said just now—as to fish in the sea—is so true of a sweetheart as a cowman. In fact truer, because no doubt there's lots of young, rising maidens near wife-old as will make very good mates for the men; but there ain't lots of chaps to match Sam Pascoe, or if there are, I ain't never seen 'em."

"Very true, indeed," replied the other. Then he hesitated, opened his mouth to speak, but put his pipe in again and kept silent. Indeed, the subject that had flashed to

Mr. Forde's mind was hardly one for the other's ear. It concerned a situation of the most delicate nature, a situation that had not yet developed, and which, in any case, could hardly be mentioned in the hearing of Thomas Finch.

They parted and the elder communed with his own heart. For within six weeks of the cowman's advent he had not failed to perceive a startling circumstance. Samuel lived at the farm and took his meals with the head man and the family. From apparent indifference towards him, there had wakened interest in the mistress of "Oatlands," and now Jenny's father believed that she began to entertain something like regard for Mr. Pascoe. Samuel quite unconsciously stimulated this emotion. He was very charming and attentive; but his good manners and cheerful smiles might be considered public property. He proved a sociable person and accepted the friendship of all who cared to offer it. There was no mystery about him. He let it be known that he was not engaged to be married, and declared himself well contented with his present lot. He liked the women and they liked him, but he seemed very complete in himself.

Then Mr. Forde made his discovery, and, once suspicious, bided his time until no shadow of doubt remained. He had in truth surprised Jenny's secret. For, if ever she had loved anybody she now found herself in love with Samuel. In the first place he was a very fascinating and elusive person, entirely attractive as a man; and in the second, she could not but perceive he conformed very closely to the gipsy's words. He was fair, amazingly good to look at, and what was still more important, a certain aloof air lent promise that Mr. Pascoe might be more than he appeared. One thing only remained to complete the great prophecy; Samuel must now fall in love with Jenny. But that, so far, he showed no signs of doing.

Yet the girl soon lived in a day dream, for nothing so beautiful and attractive as Samuel had she seen, and she doubted not that his modesty prompted him to hesitate before declaring an answering love. Her part she did, however, and presently by a thousand touches must have made it apparent to any man, not an idiot, that she cared

for him. But he made no answering sign, and once again Farmer Forde began to suffer increasing uneasiness on behalf of his child. For his part, after two months of the incomparable Pascoe, Jenny's father felt that such a son-in-law, even though he came empty-handed, would receive nothing but a welcome from him. Indeed Samuel was to be preferred even to Thomas. For Mr. Finch, of course, had intended that Jenny would leave her home for "Five Elms" when she married him, whereas since "Oatlands" would be her property upon her father's death, the advent of a man ready and willing to make the farm his care for the rest of his life, with Jenny for helpmate, was a picture that had sentimental attraction for Mr. Forde.

Still, however, Samuel held off, and not merely did he hold off, but gave no hint or sign that he was ever coming on. Sometimes indeed Jenny saw gleams of hope. She treasured his least word and counted every day's smiles; but she remembered Mr. Finch and perceived that none of the signs of a man in love marked Pascoe's friendship. He thanked her for her good offices—the button she sewed on and the socks she darned, the flower she would pick for his button-hole on Sunday, and her assiduity to furnish the dishes that Samuel declared his favourites—but nothing came of it, and when her father ventured to approach the subject and hint to Jenny that her regard for the cowman began to grow rather painfully obvious, she was frank, wept many tears, and confessed in Charles Forde's ear that she loved.

"Why the mischief he don't speak I can't think," she sobbed. "He's the man was meant for me—the man the 'wise woman' saw in her crystal. I know it by a thousand things. And he loves me—he must, if he's got a heart—but—but the silly modesty of the man! He knows I be well to do and all that. And yet—oh, 'tis a cruel trial of patience. I could slap his beautiful face sometimes. But I ban't a queen to tell him I'll marry him."

"No," admitted the farmer, "you can't tell him you'll marry him; but since I'm set on the chap very near so much as you, belike I might whisper a word in season. Only there's one cruel doubt. If he ban't got no use for you, then he'll be scared and give notice. In fact there

won't be nothing else for him to do, as a right thinking young man."

"You needn't fear no such thing," she answered. "He only wants a hint, I reckon, and if you do it clever, with a proper care for my feelings, he'll offer for me. He's a very good man and I love him; and once he knows it—though how he don't I can't guess—then he'll do the rest. I'll go to Ashburton Sunday and be out of the way, and you can say the word in season."

Mr. Forde promised and obeyed. He dreaded the interview and its sequel very gravely, for he did not share Jenny's confidence; but he spoke, and Mr. Pascoe listened. Samuel was all smiles as usual, though he did not commit himself, and after his master had hinted that Jenny was seeking a husband, the cowman declared that her chosen would be fortunate when he came along.

"The point is that he have come along," murmured Mr. Forde. "He have come along, Samuel, and since a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse, I needn't say no more than that his two initial letters be S.P. The rest I'll leave very willing to you."

Mr. Pascoe exhibited no very great astonishment, nor was his gratification marked. Indeed, he kept exceedingly cool, smiled his ineffable smile and said that Jenny's father had thrown light on an obscure situation.

"'Tis a great compliment I'm sure," he said. "I be going to eat my dinner along with Mr. Finch next Sunday, for he's shown me amazing friendship since I came to Pons-worthy; and if Miss will be so kind as to meet me to New Bridge on River Dart at three of the clock that afternoon, I'll do what I can to clear the thing up very clever."

"And terrible pleased I shall be, let me tell you," added Mr. Forde. "I think the world of you, Samuel, and though you ain't got no money, my son, you've got what's a lot better: a dollop of sense and good understanding. And I'd so soon see you reigning at 'Oatlands,' after I go home, as any man I know."

Samuel acknowledged such handsome praise fittingly.

"Ditto here," he said. "I'm very proud to work for you, master, and the man who is your son-in-law won't

have lived in vain for sartain. For you'm kindness made alive I'm sure."

"And Jenny's my daughter, Samuel."

"Favours her mother, no doubt," said Mr. Pascoe, blandly.

He preserved his impassive charm throughout the week, and made no allusion to the tryst; but he asked for Wednesday off and did not return until a late hour.

Then came the appointed afternoon, and Jenny, with a high heart, made ready after Sunday dinner. Gloves, feather, and a new frock completed the picture and she reached New Bridge five minutes before the hour.

Samuel, who had taken his dinner at "Five Elms," was not there; but at three a little procession crept from the by-way that led to Mr. Finch's farm, and Jenny Forde observed a young woman, a perambulator, and a man. The man trundled the perambulator and the young woman walked with her arm in his. It was Samuel Pascoe.

He introduced his wife and babe.

"This is my Milly, Miss," he said, "and this is my Sammy—one year old and the living daps of his mother, as you see."

Jenny kept her head with an effort. Then the procession went forward, and she struggled home. When Pascoe returned in the evening and explained that his wife had arrived two days before at the invitation of Mr. Finch, Jenny was gone to bed with a headache and Samuel's master had it out.

"You said you had no encumbrances, Samuel Pascoe," he began sternly.

"No more I have, Mr. Forde. My wife and child be the joy of my life and no more of an encumbrance than my nose. You see, 'twas this way. When I come first to wait on you, last June, I axed the road to 'Oatlands' at Farmer Finch's, and he saw me himself and got talking. And he said that I'd do very wisely to keep shut about my family, and not let on I was married for six months. Why for he advised so I can't say; but so he did. And when I heard as Miss favoured me, I went instanter to Mr. Finch and told him how 'twas and he said the truth must out, and he'd take in my family for a few days; which he did do. And so it

happened and I done as he advised, and went o' Wednesday to fetch Milly and Sam. And Mr. Finch be wanting a new cowman and dairymaid also. So, no doubt 'twill be the cleverest thing for me to go to him come my month's out."

"This be a dark and devilish plot then?" asked Mr. Forde, with gathering indignation. "A plot against me and my darter?"

"Not on my part," answered Samuel. "I understood as you liked for your people to be single, but I hoped when I'd made good, you'd overlook my wife and child. As to your darter, Mr. Finch never named her name to me."

So the cowman prepared to join a new master; Jenny went to the seaside to recover; and Mr. Forde demanded an explanation from his old friend, which Mr. Finch did not deny him.

"I wanted a slap at her," confessed Thomas, "and when that terrible handsome, flaxen chap come along, I saw my way. It all went very clever, and she didn't get an ounce more than she deserved, as you well know, Charles. Now she'll understand a bit of what she made me suffer—if she can understand anything. And, of course, Samuel couldn't stay along with you no more, so he comes to me. Sorry I had to hit you so hard, but I couldn't be evens with your beastly Jenny no other way."

"Then this I'll say," answered the elder. "You've done a hateful thing, Thomas Finch, and though the law can't reach you, I hope your conscience will; and never speak to me no more, for you be dead to me hereafter."

"As you please, farmer. But you can have my old cowman if you mind to. He's going begging, and he's got a skew eye and one leg shorter than t'other, and no hair on his poll—flaxen or otherwise—so your girl bain't likely to make no trouble for you in that quarter."

THE WISE WOMAN

THE WISE WOMAN

I

GILYAN POMEROY came of the race of Caunters that lived time out of mind at Dartmeet, where the two branches of the river join together. Her mother was called Gilyan also, and so was her grandmother; and she would tell a mighty strange tale about her grandmother. You could take it or leave it, for nobody troubled less about what other people thought of her than Gilyan Pomeroy; but for my part I never saw any call to doubt it, being one of those people that don't refuse to believe a thing just because it happened a hundred years ago. Anyway, she always said that her grandmother had without question been took as a little one by the pixies, and the strange creatures left in her place a changeling child. But the mother of the babe that had been took always well knew the changeling weren't no daughter of her's. The little thing was unkid in its ways and wouldn't eat nor yet sleep like an honest human infant; and she longed for her own back, and so did her husband.

Then one day, the fairy creature being by that time up home five years old, if the foster-mother didn't pick her up and make as if she was going to pop the brat into the oven! But the real mother weren't far off and in a moment the pixy-wife appeared in a terror of fear and cried out to Gilyan Pomeroy's great-grandmother to hold her hand.

A little, dark fairy she was, two feet high, or thereabouts, in a bottle-green kirtle and naked feet, with her hair like a black spider's web streaked with sky blue. So she was described; and along with her came the little girl she'd stole away.

"Take your own back, you wicked woman!" piped the pixy-mother. "Take her back and give me mine, and see

how I've treated your child far better than you've treated my child!"

She ran to her babe and the elfin thing screamed with delight to see her, and in a moment both had vanished. Then the human mother turned to her own, and sure enough she found her so plump as a partridge and happy as a bee.

But the babe hadn't been along with the little people for nothing, for she grew up a wise woman, and more than that, in time to come her eldest daughter grew up a wise woman also and now, in the third generation, was Gilyan Pomeroy; and she was a wise woman too.

Which story I don't see no call to doubt and, in the case of Widow Pomeroy, nobody ever questioned that she was a long ways cleverer than her neighbours. Her grandmother had been held a witch, and people crossed their fingers before they'd pass her; and her mother had friends and foes also, because, though skilled in charms and simples, it was thought she'd do a bit of black magic, too, sometimes, and overlook man and beast if she was thwarted; but Gilyan the Third, the widow of Nicholas Pomeroy, never had any truck with dark things. She was a white witch, and so kind as she was wise, and had never but one enemy in her life to my knowledge.

At eighteen she showed her cleverness by marrying a very honest, stupid man. For she had the wit to see that while Nicholas Pomeroy weren't going to set the sieve on fire, yet he was the type that promised peace if not plenty. Yet plenty there was, too, for it happened that Nick was the only son of Jarvis Pomeroy, and he was the owner of Walna Farm. Walna, you must know, be one of the tenements and don't belong to the over-lord of Dartmoor. There's a few tenement farms still left; but when they fall in, Duchy generally grabs 'em. Jarvis Pomeroy hated Duchy, however, and his dying words to Nicholas were never to part from Walna; and Nicholas promised.

His father dropped early, as Pomeroys be wont to do. Not one of our real, hardy, long-lived families by no means, and you'll seldom find a man Pomeroy keep out of his grave after seventy-five, though the women fare better. But Jarvis died along of an accident, and Nicholas and his wife, Gilyan, were at his death-bed, and when in his turn, only five years

after that, Gilyan's husband was snatched by a pneumonia he didn't ought to have catched but for his own carelessness, he spoke to his wife just the same as his father had spoke to him, and warned her that, come what might, she mustn't sell Walna to the Duchy, nor yet nobody else.

"You needn't fear nothing like that, Nick," she said, holding the dying man's hand. "Walna belongs to your son and mine, and though he can't rule here for a good few years yet, be sure the time will come when he do. Trust me, my faithful dear, and I'll bring him up to be so good a farmer and fine a man as yourself, the lad helping."

So Nicholas died without a care, except the sorrow of leaving a good wife and a nice little boy and Walna.

And Gilyan proved true to her word; for she devoted her days to the child and never married no more, but bided single and kept the weeds off her husband's grave and the stone clean upon it.

She was in two minds whether to stop at Walna herself and bring up the boy on his own ground; but that's where her cleverness came in, and she reckoned that it would be a lot better to have a first-class tenant, who knew his business and weren't afraid of spending a bit of money, than stop herself with a hind or two and let things take their course.

So she cleared out and let the place to a gentleman farmer well thought on in the neighbourhood and well to do—a rich man's son, who came to the Moor for his health and horse-riding and sporting, and so on. She got her rent regular, and for a matter of two year it looked all right; but then it did not. The young man was too fond of fox-hunting and snipe-shooting, and salmon-fishing, and also couldn't let the girls alone. So, with all these occupations and repeated trips to Plymouth—for a breath of sea air, no doubt, and to get his hair cut and one thing and another—he hadn't much time to give to the requirements of Walna, nor yet the money to spare that Gilyan Pomeroy expected he would have for upkeep and improvements. In fact, after two years the novelty was off it and the chap's father got tired of paying the rent. He offered a deal to be quit, and Gilyan felt only too glad to agree and seek a soberer sort of man for her son's property.

"No more gentlemen-farmers for me," she said to Jane White, the post-mistress at Merripit village. "I must find

a chap who knows his business next time, and one married for choice."

And she found Samuel Weekes; and a child could have seen he was married by the face of the man. He had a wife, and he had a daughter, and the wife was called Hannah, and she gave him hell, while the daughter's name was Milly—a pretty piece, seven year old.

Sam proved a good bit of a failure; but here the woman in Gilyan Pomeroy came out, and she grew in time to be so terrible sorry for the poor chap, that she hadn't the heart to send him going. He didn't let down the farm and he didn't pick out the eyes of it, as many careless and thoughtless men will do, especially if they be working somebody else's land and not their own. He kept up Walna, and there was no fault to find in that particular; but where the difficulty arose was along with the rent. It fell behind from the start, and Gilyan would drop in at such times as Hannah Weekes was away to market, and talk to Sammy, and he'd pretty near shed tears about it and promise to do better.

"You know where the money goes," he'd say. "It don't become me to run down my wife behind her back, Mrs. Pomeroy, and you wouldn't think none the better of me if I was to do so; but a more damned, hard-fisted, grasping woman never turned a harmless man's hair grey quicker than what she have mine. The hateful wretch will be clothed in purple and fine linen, in Bible language, and she will drink whisky to her meals, for her stomach's sake, and you may or may not know what whisky costs, but I do; and that's where your rent goes, for the creature's long since dead to every vartue a wife did ought to have, and I wish I was going out to dig her pit for her in the churchyard this minute. But real hard words you mustn't expect me to utter against her, because I've always remembered what becomes a husband, though she's forgot the little she ever knew of a wife's conduct."

He'd growl on like that, and then, when he stopped for his wind, she'd explain her side.

"I'm comfortable in my little house on the hill and I don't want to be hard on you, Sammy, because I know you ban't one of the lucky ones and Hannah's a handful, to say it kindly; but William—my fine son is going to the Seale-

Hayne Agricultural College next year to learn his business, so as he shall shine at Walna in his turn when it comes, like his father did, and like you do. But the College costs money and, of course, the rent is a good part of my income."

"I know—I know," he answered; "and God's my judge, if I've got to kill all my calves, you shall have it. I'm counting on the things * this fall. There's good money in sight—more than my hen devil have any idea of, for I'm sweating to keep it from her, and if I don't let it out talking in my sleep—which my troubles often drive me to do—then the back numbers shall all be made up, my dear woman, and a bit of interest also, if I can squeeze it out."

"I don't want no interest," she assured him, and then he'd fetch her a pound of his heather honey, like amber shining through milk, and praise her for a just woman and wish his Maker had sent him such another.

So Gilyan would go her way, and come evening, Mrs. Weekes would drive back in the cart with her empty baskets and her market money, and bottle of spirits in place of the pair of fine chickens she'd set out with. And Sam would run out to her with his melancholy smile.

"Well, my dear woman, welcome back!" he'd say. "Milly and me have got tea ready for 'e, and I hope you ban't weary and your stomach haven't put 'e to any trouble."

A great, red woman she was, barge-built, with a hot face and round, bitter sharp eyes and a voice like a man's. 'Twas amazing how active the big creature could be and how she got about in every nook and cranny of Walna.

And presently she'd have her tea and show a bit of bright rag or a lace collar she'd bought for herself, and ask how things had gone, and tell her news. Then, when she heard that Gilyan Pomeroy had dropped in touching the rent, her voice and her colour would go a tone deeper together, and she'd use very crooked words, for much she hated the landlady and never was known to say a good word for her.

"Drat the woman! Why do she always poke in here when my back's turned? I won't have it, and I'll tell her so—a skinflint wretch! Who be she to grind our faces for her rent and ax three times what this God-forgotten hole be worth?

* Things—sheep and cattle.

And who but a know-nought great fool like you would have took up with the place?"

"'Twas you decided for it, Hannah—you, and only you. I always had my doubts, but you went for it bald-headed the moment you saw it."

"Don't you answer me, you zany! And, be it as 'twill, the cunning, underhand toad ain't coming here wasting your time while I'm working at market. Everybody knows she's a witch at heart, and who ever sees her to church—tell me that?"

"Not you, because you never darkens the doors yourself, except when you put on a new gown," he answered with spirit. "And I'll say more than that, Hannah; I'll say that it's a very ill-convenient thing for you to call me 'a know-nought great fool' before my daughter, and I'll ax you not to repeat it."

Then Mrs. Weekes laughed from the depths of her stomach, like thunder rolling under the horizon.

"My life! D'you think it's any news to Milly?" she asked. "D'you think it's any news to anybody?"

Anon she left him and went about her ways. In five minutes she discovered that a pound of honey was gone, and when she learned whither, the day closed in tempest.

II.

It's a wonderful world, and without doubt human nature be the most wonderful thing in it. There was some at Merripit that liked Mrs. Weekes, and even Sammy himself, such was the large heart of the man, could find excuses for her now and again.

"'Tis this way," he would say to Gilyan Pomeroy; "all women like their husbands to be shiners. And I ain't a shiner."

"Well, she knew that very well before she took you," the widow would say; but Samuel declared that perfect love casts out sense as well as fear.

"You marry us in hope," he answered, "and you build up a very fine idea of us and think, because we've dazzled you for the minute, we've dazzled the rest of the world likewise. Natural vanity makes every woman want to think she's

drawn a prize to her. And when the love's gone and she looks at the man with seeing eyes, like the rest of the people do, then she's most times terrible disappointed."

But while Hannah's friends were not numerous, as years passed, her daughter Milly became the most popular maiden at Merripit. She grew up mild, gentle and pretty. She had learned patience at home and developed a nature not devoid of her mother's energy, but winning from her father other qualities, which he possessed, though fret and fume of married life tended to keep them in the background.

Milly was fair, tall and naturally cheerful. A love of fun saved many trying situations, and though she could not bring much of cheerfulness into her home, she did her best even there for her father's sake. Her parents esteemed her in their different ways, and Hannah, awake to her daughter's beauty, desired to see her well married and in her own home so soon as possible; while Samuel mourned the thought of parting from her, yet knew it must happen.

Then fell out a mighty complication to life, which threatened to find Mrs. Weekes and Gilyan Pomeroy in open and dangerous collision, for when young William Pomeroy was nineteen years old and Milly two years younger, they fell in love and the fat was in the fire.

While the pair was growing up, a sort of an armed peace stood between Hannah and Gilyan; because it takes two for a quarrel and Widow Pomeroy never would fall out with nobody. But now it looked as if the wise woman was going to find herself called to answer a difficult question; because, while Milly's mother looked far higher than William and wouldn't hear his name in Walna, very soon Mrs. Pomeroy had the highest possible opinion of Milly and felt above measure sure that she was the right one for Bill. In fact, young though they were, her heart was set on the match, and finding such a tower of strength on their side, the couple felt they had a right to live in hope.

You see, William, though a nice, honourable lad, didn't get his mother's brains. In fact, he was a thought slow-witted, though a pleasing fashion of man to the eye; so Gilyan, who knew his strength and his weakness, felt that a steadfast, good-hearted and intelligent girl, like Milly Weekes, would be a godsend for him and a gift straight from Providence.

She looked all round the problem in her wise, calm way, and having convinced herself the match was good in every particular, set out to win Hannah. She weren't in no hurry, but let a year go by feeling her ground, and then, six years before the lease of Walna was up and her son would return to it, she made her first move and went in to have a tell with Mrs. Weekes all open and friendly. And she chose a time when Samuel was to Mortonhampstead, because she well knew that he was on her side, and the less he had to do with things the better.

So she went to Walna, much to the other woman's surprise, because though they passed the time of day when they met, they usually kept out of each other's houses.

But now she dropped in one afternoon and asked for a cup of tea; and Sammy's wife, knowing the rent was hanging fire a good bit as usual, guessed Gilyan had called about that. As for the other matter, since William's mother had bade him and Milly keep their mouths shut close, and they had obeyed, Mrs. Weekes believed the friendship had petered out, as she intended it should do.

"And how's your stomach?" asked Gilyan, taking a chair, after the farmer's wife had dusted it with no good grace.

"Just the same," growled Hannah in her bass voice. "I can let down beef and mutton in reason; but with pork I've always got to ask myself. I don't hope for recovery now. 'Tis just a thorn, like other thorns. As I say to Samuel, 'You may hear me rumble, but you never hear me grumble.' Whisky is the only thing, though a bottle lasts me a week most times."

But Mrs. Pomeroy, of course, knew very well that the big woman drank three bottles a week by now. In fact, everybody knew it.

"You mustn't think," continued Hannah, "that I take spirits for pleasure. I'm not that sort; and you mustn't think as I take my whisky out of your rent either; because I don't."

"That's all right. I haven't come about the rent. I was hearing from Jane White at the post office that you said I knew more than an honest woman ought to know, and that my magic, so to call it, was black magic, and that I did the folk a bad turn oftener than they guessed."

"God forgive the woman, then, for I won't," answered Hannah. "I spoke in confidence, and she's a tale-bearer and a mischief-maker and a disgrace, and I've done with her from this hour. But say it I did, and I believe it. You be well known for a dark woman and full of doubtful cleverness."

Gilyan drank at her tea so calm as you please.

"Think better of me," she said. "This is only the tittle-tattle of silly women, and you should be too well educated to believe it."

"Your mother was a noted witch, and your grandmother likewise," argued Mrs. Weekes, glowering at her.

"They could see deeper into a well than some—that's all. They did clever things, though I never heard any decent person ever quarrelled with 'em. My mother handed down some wisdom to me, I grant—a few charms and a cure or two for hurts to man and beast; but never nothing to harm folk. Didn't I vanquish Milly's whitlow in a week, and didn't I cure Tom Caunter's cow when the vet. could not? There's no more to me than commonsense, and though rare, I never yet heard it called black magic."

"We'd best to leave it, then," answered Hannah. "Only this I will say, and I don't care who hears me: there's no smoke without fire, Mrs. Pomeroy, and you'll do well to be careful!"

"Never heard better advice," replied the placid widow. "And talking of fire, there's a great fire sprung up between yours and mine—your Milly and my William. She's very near wife-old now, and he be husband-high; and what might you and your good man think of such a notion?"

She put it that innocent, as if it was a bit of news.

"What my man thinks don't matter the tail of a flea," said Hannah, "because he don't think. He lives and eats and sleeps and works, and that's all there is to Samuel, or ever was. But what I think is this: I'd sooner see my daughter in her grave than tokened to your William. There's nothing like plain mouth-speech, Mrs. Pomeroy, and I say this: I won't have it—not for an instant moment. Milly's so good as promised to Adam French of Hartland—a man as would make two of your son in brains if not in body."

"A very nice young fellow is Adam French—honest, and all he should be, for certain. And so's my son, and if he

never did a wise thing before, he done one when he fell in love with Milly," answered Gilyan, smiling and cool as ever. "But you say 'no.' I'm not surprised, because I'm a great dreamer of dreams I must tell you, and not a week since but I dreamed I was sitting over a dish of tea along with you, just as I am at present, and you said that you didn't want for Milly to take William and was set against it."

"Your dream was true, then," said Hannah.

"They often come true and, again, they often do not," explained the other. "'Tis second sight in a manner of speaking and not seldom, when I've seen bad luck in a dream for a neighbour, I've been terrible sad to find it happen."

"A very dangerous thing, and might get you into trouble if it was known," declared Hannah.

"But I can't help it. Not so long ago but I dreamed—however, 'tis no matter. So you won't countenance the young people? A great pity in my opinion, for they be so well suited to each other as the halves of a flail."

"Never—once for all!"

Mrs. Pomeroy rose up then and took her leave.

"I only wanted to know where we stood. I'm very wishful for this marriage. It would fall out very vitty in the time to come."

"Good evening," answered the other. "It won't be while I'm above ground, so there's an end of that."

"That's right. No need to mention I've called."

So they parted, and while Hannah felt that triumphant that she must needs open the whisky bottle, Gilyan went her way quite satisfied. For she'd done a lot more than appeared, and she weren't called a wise woman for nothing; and when her son, who very well knew what she'd been up to, axed for news, she told him to keep quiet and patient, and go on as he was going and say nothing to nobody.

"I've seen her and I've heard her, and I've drunk the stuff she calls tea," explained Gilyan. "She don't understand tea, not being a beverage that interests her; and she don't understand that you and Milly be made to wed, if ever a pair was. So now that I know where we all are, I'll move. You can tell Milly two things; first that her mother says she's as good as promised to Adam French, and second that she'll be engaged all right and regular to you in six months, and no

sooner. But for the present let her be dutiful and patient; and you can bid her tell Adam French she's got no use for him once for all. He's a sensible young man and far too nice to thrust himself upon her when he knows that. And the rest you can leave to Providence and your mother."

III.

'Twas in the spring of the year when these things happened and not a sign did Gilyan give for three good months. Then she contrived to drop in at Mrs. Masters', who was one of the people that upheld Hannah Weekes and always spoke well of her. Nor was she set against Gilyan neither, but reckoned the bitterness of Samuel's wife was caused by the sleepless bother about rent.

When Gilyan called one morning, having seen Milly's mother go that way, she found old Mrs. Masters and her friend having a drop out of the bottle, for spirits was a close link between 'em, and she didn't take no note of that, but wished 'em "good day" and axed the elder for the loan of her frying-pan.

"Mine's gived out all of a sudden," she said, "and if you ain't using yourn for dinner, I'll be greatly beholden to you by it."

Mrs. Masters fetched the frying-pan and asked Gilyan to have a spot of cordial, and she agreed, though she never touched nothing more than elder-flower of her own brewing as a rule; and then she talked and somehow the conversation got round to dreams again.

"At it once more," she told 'em. "'Tis a masterpiece how I see things, and just when I'm beginning to think there may be something in it, then all the dreams go wrong."

"Dreams be well known never to come true," said Mrs. Masters.

"Not often, I grant you. I dreamed that the White baby was going to die when she was ill. I cried about it, I promise you, for they Whites be a very proper pair. But the child lived. And then I dreamed that Adam French had offered for Farmer Sweetland's daughter and been refused; and whether that's true or not, who shall say?"

"It's true," declared Mrs. Masters. "Farmer told me himself."

"Then I dreamed that my William was going to get a five pound note as a gift on his twentieth birthday last week; and I did think that would happen, because my brother be very fond of William and won't forget him some day. But I dreamed wrong: he sent the boy ten pound."

"Never!" cried Mrs. Masters.

"True as this hand. And nothing to my brother. And then one more I dreamed, and that was about Walna."

"I beg you won't dream about me, nor yet my family," said Hannah rather sharp, "because I don't like it and I won't have it."

"You can't say who you'll dream about, my dear woman," answered Mrs. Pomeroy; "but in truth it weren't about you at all. It was all about my late husband's grandfather, who died in your kitchen, sitting by the fire reading his Bible. But in my dream he was alive and I see him just as I mind him in his Sunday worked smock. A wonderful garment as he wore to the end of his life and left in his will he should be buried in, which he was. And in the dream I see him digging behind the pigs' house in a little patch there, where there used to be a muck heap; though what Mr. Weekes uses it for nowadays I don't know."

"He don't use it. 'Tis under nettles," said Hannah.

"There was old Drake Pomeroy—called after the hero, I believe—and he dug a hole and put in a bright new tin and covered it up quick and went off with his spade over his shoulder. A silly dream, and yet I can see why for I dreamed it."

"Why?" asked Hannah.

"Because two nights ago I met your husband and he was telling me about the old bird. He had a terrible vexatious way of hiding his savings, being feared of his life that robbers would break in on Walna some time. And he wouldn't trust no bank neither; and they had a proper bother hunting through the house and every hole and corner, when he was took sudden with never a minute to tell about his little hoards. They found five hundred pound in gold tucked away in all sorts of places, and my Nicholas always said there was more hid. So that shows how things you hear by day often turn into nonsense in your dreams."

"I'd take something for it," advised Mrs. Masters. "You don't get your proper rest, Gilyan, when the brain's working like that."

"I wish I knew what to take," answered the dreamer. "I hate 'em, and I always feel fresher the nights I dream nothing. But my last vision have come true in a most surprising way. Two nights before I dreamed I was walking along with William on the seashore—a thing I never did in my life—and would you believe it—the very next morning came a letter from the Seale Hayne College, where he's just finishing his special lessons, and he says that he's set on me and him going to Bude for a week together, So no doubt it will happen."

"You rich people can frolic about like ladies and gentlemen, no doubt," said Mrs. Masters, with a touch of envy in her voice, and then they talked of money and not one of 'em ran it down neither. For 'tis only the rich say money's a cuss; the poor know damn well it ain't.

Then, just as they was separating and Gilyan going her way with the pan, Mrs. Weekes snapped out a question.

"You needn't answer me if you've no mind to it," she said, "but you know my views about my daughter and your son?"

"Very well, and what of it?" asked William's mother.

"Did she send him a keepsake on his birthday, or did she not? I've asked her and she says she didn't; but I doubt it's a lie."

"Doubt no more," answered Gilyan. "There's never been a more truthful girl than Milly. She did not send my son a keepsake."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Weekes, and they didn't see one another again for three months.

The only bright thing about the next six weeks was that Sammy paid a quarter's rent at Ladyday, which only left him three quarters behind; but when he came along with it, he had a bit of bad news and Gilyan was terrible sorry for him.

"Fust time in living memory," he said, "and I hope as it may be the last; but on Saturday night, when I came home for my drop of beer and rally with the neighbours at 'The Hearty Welcome,' I was met by Milly so white as a day's tooth with fear. Hannah had had a very good day indeed to market

and brought home a useful bit of money and seemed as sharp as usual; but now I heard fearful news. 'Mother's gone mad!' says Milly; but in a minute I see what had overtook my wife. The whisky bottle told me. First time ever she went too far, Mrs. Pomeroy. We got her to bed and I'll draw the veil over the small hours; but in the morning she swore 'twas a stomach spasm and nought to do with the drink. I wept over the woman, and all she done was to tell me to shut my head. I tell you these things because you've the heart to understand."

"'Twas an accident, belike," said Gilyan. "Don't you take on too much. I'll warrant she was over-tired and didn't know what she was up to."

"It flies to the liver as be well known," murmured Sammy, "and once she gets a correlgated liver, it's good-bye. I must live in hope, Mrs. Pomeroy; for hope be pretty near all I've got left to cling to nowadays."

And what he meant exactly, who shall say?

"Don't name it, however," she begged him. "Don't you tell a living soul, Samuel, for such things, if they get out, do a woman harm."

"Trust me. I ban't the sort to holloa my shame," he answered; but of course that's the very sort he was, and in a week everybody knew Hannah had gone all the way.

And then Mrs. Pomeroy done a mysterious deed. She took the three five-pound notes what Samuel had brought her for rent, and she went into Moretonhampstead in the carrier's cart, and she called at the shop of all sorts kept by John Blee—a place where most Merripit people deal, when they ride to town for their marketing. And she asked John how he was off for gold, and he said much as usual. But he could change her paper, she found, and when he'd given her fifteen yellow boys, she looked 'em over with a good deal of interest till she came to the seventh. Then she counted the remaining ones quick and did her purchases and came away.

Then summer returned and William took his mother to Bude and made her dream come true. They were away for a fortnight, and William was on to her night and day about Milly, for the six months she'd promised had very near run out by now, and he couldn't see that things was any forwarder. He didn't come of age till he was twenty-five, for his father

reckoned that was quite soon enough for the rising generation to be free of their betters; and so he'd got a good few years to go before he began at Walna on his own, when Samuel's lease ran out.

His mother calmed him and in due time they went home again; and then happened the amazing thing. Nobody ever knew the truth till long after; but it went like this, and I can swear to every word on it for the best possible reason:

There came a day when Gilyan went over to Mrs. Weekes, and she began by saying that she thought Hannah might like to hear of her visit to the sea; but the other replied that it didn't interest her particular to hear of other people's good fortune.

"We'll talk of something that will interest you then," answered the wise woman—all peaceful and smiling as usual. "And first I'd much like to hear if you see different touching Milly and William, for I do think they was born for each other, and Mr. Weekes is of the same mind."

"I've said all there is to be said on that subject," growled Hannah, "and if you be come to open up that again, you'd best to go, afore I say words you might be sorry to hear."

"So be it—then I'll do the talking," answered Gilyan. "I shan't keep you; but I'd much like to learn where you got this old King George sovereign from, ma'am."

She fetched out a coin and put it under t'other's nose. Her manner had changed also, and she was short and sharp now.

Mrs. Weekes couldn't turn white, exactly, being too red by nature to do so; but she went so pale as she knew and gave a gurgle; then she pulled herself together and tried to carry it off.

"I never see the coin in my life—God's my judge."

"Don't you take the Name, or it may be the worse for you," answered the other sternly; "and since you won't tell me how you came by it, *I'll tell you*. Last spring I put twenty-five of them old sovereigns in a rusty tin canister and buried 'em under the nettles by your pigs' house. And I waited for two months, till the weeds was growed; and then I told you about my dream, that old Drake Pomeroy was seen by me burying a bit of money there. And I reckoned you would make sure if it was one of my false dreams, or one of my true ones. And you very soon did. The money I had from my

own grandfather for a wedding gift—twenty-five old King George sovereigns he left me; and I kept 'em by me, and 'twas the knowledge I'd got 'em made me think upon the dream. And you found 'em, well knowing they was Pomeroy money, Hannah Weekes."

"That's a lie," vowed the other.

"It ban't a lie that you changed the old gold for new gold at John Blee's shop," continued Gilyan; "and that's just what I knew you would do. 'Tis no good saying nothing, my dear, because I've got all the proofs, and the story would sound so terrible bad that it mustn't go beyond me and you. I don't want the money again, nor nothing like that; but I do feel 'twould be a cruel pity if the tale got abroad. And when you see that Milly and William will make a wonderful fine pair and find yourself able to smile upon the match, then I shall forget all about my dream and how you made it come true."

Well, Mrs. Weekes wriggled a bit and I believe she used some coarse language also; but there it was: she'd got to be shown up for something very like a thief, or else fall in with the engagement, and finally she gave in, though 'twas living death to her to do it. It broke her heart, I do believe, and you may say she went down the hill pretty quick after that. She sanctioned the match and no time was wasted in that matter; and then she took to the whisky more desperate than ever. She never spoke nor yet looked at my mother again—my mother I call her, for Gilyan Pomeroy was my mother and I be William, her son, who married Milly Weekes, and be reigning at Walna to this day.

All went according to the will of the watching Lord, and my father-in-law had a good few years of peace at the last, for when Hannah burned out her liver once for all and passed away under very painful circumstances, me and Milly went to the farm and took up the reins from that day forward. And Samuel grew ten years younger in a month. 'Twas then and no sooner that my mother told me the truth.

Not till old Sammy passed in his turn did he leave us, and by that time we'd got a barrow-load of childer. And when Sam was gone, my mother came back to Walna; and she be living yet and wiser than ever.

THE QUARRY

THE QUARRY

You may say there's only two kinds of people in the world, when you get to the bottom of human nature, and one kind be a thought too clever, and the others ban't quite clever enough. And for my part, being one of the second sort, I'd a long sight sooner neighbour with them than the first. There's lots of nice fools you can live with all your life and miss 'em when they've gone; for the Lord, well knowing which fashion of man is best for the world, chooses to build the staple of us with no more brains than we want; while as for the smart people, they are doubtless here to keep the simple ones awake—same as poultry have to learn that hawks fly in the air so well as starlings; and the coneys be reminded now and then, rather sharp, that there's such a creature as a fox.

And Samuel Rattery was the trustful, hopeful stamp of young fellow we all know, while his brother, David, favoured his dead mother and had a good brain and a tricky nature. But they clever people are often the pepper in our dish of life, and when William Rattery followed his wife to the grave and Samuel found himself master at Cleave Farm, he knew by experience that his younger brother was going to be the pepper all right. And being a peace-loving sort of chap, who hated surprises and adventures, and only asked for things to go on without fret and change, he had a sort of idea, after his father was gone home, that Cleave would be a far happier place, and more successful also, if David took himself elsewhere.

They all worked the farm together, with one or two hinds, while William lived, and Cleave being a freehold and long in the family, it had now fallen to Samuel, who was his father's eldest; but William hadn't forgot David, only knowing his younger son parlous well, he'd left his portion in Samuel's

keeping, and directed that Dave should have a yearly income so long as he worked to earn it, but no capital unless he left Cleave Farm and could show Samuel and Mr. Masterman, the lawyer, of a good investment, where a bit of money might be placed to the young man's advantage.

Sam was twenty-seven when his father died, and David four and twenty, and the old man hadn't got the grass green on him before Dave was at his brother to raise his money. He ordained for the present to bide at Cleave, where he was very comfortable; but he weren't content with two pound ten a week, which was what his father paid him, and when Samuel wouldn't give him no more until he worked a lot harder, David Rattery took it ill.

So there was a good bit of feeling between 'em from the start, and no parent left to back Samuel; while as for his aunt, old Ann Rattery, who looked after the farm indoors, she liked David best and always had done. He had a dashing sort of way with him and some of the new ideas. He was more interesting than Samuel, who had no use for ideas, especially new ones. But the extra clever fellows always be more interesting than us simple chaps, because you never know what they'll do next; and to keep you guessing is the way to keep you interested—especially if you're a woman.

Besides, Dave happened to be mighty good-looking—the only Rattery that ever was in my memory. Tall, slim, with a hard, blue eye, a clean-cut face, a firm chin and curly hair—russet as the dead fern—such was he; and a woman will do more for a real blue eye, even if it's shifty, than she will for most things. A pleasant voice he had also, and a laugh that sounded honest as a bell. In fact, you might say he was a very promising man all round, and the maidens thought a lot of him.

Samuel was different—a stuggy-built go-by-the-ground fellow, with a plain and humble face, thatch the colour of old straw, and a kick in his voice. He weren't very clever, and he'd get very excited over nothing at all, and he had a nature prone to look on the dark side, when there weren't no reason to do so. A nervous man, but good as gold, and couldn't have done a doubtful deed, nor over-reach a neighbour. He'd often go in and see sick folk for pure kindness, and even make journeys sometimes so far as Exeter to visit an old chap as had

been a great friend of his father's and was now a bed-lier. But being what he was, the invalids always shivered in secret when he came to sit along with 'em, for they knew, poor souls, that Samuel weren't a ray of sunshine in a sick room, but quite the contrary, in fact, a bleak sort of man for one so young, and a sad man despite his fortunate fate. More comfortable at a funeral than a wedding any day of the week, and he didn't deny it.

Yet, nevertheless, in his steadfast way, Samuel now decided that he must have a wife to carry on the name of Rattery, and he cast about in his methodical fashion, and thought upon the Ilsington maidens, one by one, and settled that Jemima Snow might be the likeliest. She was terrible poor, the daughter of the sexton; but money being no object to Samuel, he went for character, and guessed that, with such a bringing-up as Jemima had been called to suffer, she'd fetch a lot of sense to Cleave and make a thrifty and patient sort of wife. For Thomas Snow had been left a widow man at fifty years old, and to his eldest, Jemima, fell the task of keeping her father's house and bringing up a proper barrow-load of younger brothers and sisters.

Samuel reckoned she might not be sorry to find herself in her own home; but he weren't hopeful—he never was—and in his opinion one thing stood much against success. For Jemima chanced to be a terrible pretty girl. He knew that, because a score of people had told him so; but for his part he had no eye for beauty and weren't any judge of a woman's good looks. But he understood that the beauties set a higher price on themselves than the homely ones; and he reckoned that Jemima might think she was worth a better market than him.

He knew Jemima herself pretty well, but always cautious, Sammy sounded her father first, and found the sexton very much on his side. For he was quite a catch in his small way, and Thomas Snow looked forward and doubted not that if Jemima was fixed at Cleave, there might be found good work there presently for some of his up-growing lads. So Jemima's father told Samuel to go on with it, and wished him luck.

But the very night that he heard the coast was clear, after supper, as he sat smoking along with his brother, before going

to his rest, a fearful shock came to Samuel, and it was his brother that gave it to him.

David, in his usual careless manner, plumped out the news.

"I be going to get married, Sam," he said, "and after that you'll have to find yourself with larger ideas, because, if I bring a wife to Cleave, things must be different and a bit more money come my way."

The other's jaw dropped and his eyes rolled. He looked at David, and he looked at his aunt, who was mending socks by the table; and then he said: "Oh!"

"Yes, 'Oh!'" replied David.

"And who might it be?" asked Samuel.

"Tommy Snow's daughter—Jemima, if I know anything," answered Dave.

And then, as if he weren't prepared to argue about it, he got up, knocked out his pipe, spat in the fire and went to bed.

"Have you heard about this, Aunt Ann?" asked Samuel, when he'd took it in. He was stuttering a lot, as he always did after a surprise, whether pleasant or the opposite.

"Nothing whatever," said the old woman.

For ten minutes they didn't speak, then old Miss Rattery made another remark.

"As he's the finest man in the parish and she's the prettiest woman, it ain't no astonishment to me they've found each other," she said.

"It is to me," answered Samuel.

"Everything astonishes you," she replied.

"For this reason," he explained. "I was along with Mr. Snow but three hours agone—or it might be three and a half hours—and he'd heard nought about it."

"How do you know he hadn't?" she asked, puckering her eyes to thread a needle.

"Because I wanted to find out if he'd let me court Jemima myself, and he was very wishful for me to do so. In fact, he went so far as to hope I'd win her."

"The battle's to the strongest, then," said Miss Rattery.

"My God!" cried Samuel, excited in a minute. "'Twill be the house out of windows, Aunt Ann."

"Why for?" asked the old woman. "Haven't two brothers wanted the same woman afore to-day? If you can court her, so can David, and she may take one or t'other, or

she may turn you both down ; but the end of the world ban't likely to happen whatever she does."

You could never call her a comforting woman where Samuel was concerned, and he knew he'd get no help against David from her. That night he was very near minded to give up the job out of hand, and I dare say he would have done so ; but chance willed that the very next day he fell in with Jemima herself trapsing up from the gamekeeper's cottage at Yarner Wood. John Barlow, the old keeper, had just ended his suffering life, and the Barlows were related to the Snows some way, so Jemima had dropped in to say they were sorry about it.

Now Samuel went along beside her and slowed his hoss to do so.

She was talking of poor old Barlow's poor old wife, and at another time the farmer would have been full of pity and off to see the widow in a minute ; but at this moment he weren't interested in anything but Jemima herself. She was gracious and pleasant, and he adventured an offer for a walk, so as he might get to the bottom of the situation. So he asked her if she would go to the old quarry under Hey Tor Rock next Sunday, and come home along to Cleave for a dish of tea after. And she was pleased, though not so surprised as he expected to see her.

"I'd like to do it," said Jemima—a dark girl with big brown eyes, a fine figure, long legs and a mane of hair so black as a crow. "I've heard tell of the famous quarry all my life, and never yet found time to look at it."

"Don't you come, however, if 'tis pouring rain," said Samuel, and she said she would not.

Then he went further and asked a home question, and got an answer that made him stutter so as he couldn't speak for a full minute.

"Do you know my brother David?" he inquired.

"Only by sight," said Jemima. "He never comes down our way much—all for towns when he's free, I expect."

Samuel very near fell off his hoss at the thought of anybody so daring as to say he'd wed a maiden he didn't know. He couldn't believe that there was such a man in creation, let alone a Rattery.

He got his breath and presently said he must be going on.

Then he rode off and left her, and she looked after him with a good bit of wonder in her eyes.

But she kept her word, and when Sunday came, Samuel went up to the old quarry, and saw Jemima waiting where they'd ordained to meet. It all fell very vitty, because the autumn afternoon was bright and fair, and David was out of the way. He had gone off for a Saturday till Monday with a friend to Plymouth, to see a football match and amuse himself after.

Hey Tor Quarry stood midway between Ilsington, far down in the vale below, and Cleave, on a hill near two mile distant northward, so as a half-way house it was all right, and Samuel, in his Sunday black, thought Jemima looked very fine. She wore a blue frock, with a bit of mole fur round her neck and a hat of the same.

To the quarry they went—a great, gaping hole in the hillside, surrounded by broken cliffs of stone and having in the midst a pool so deep that you couldn't see near to the bottom, though the water was crystal clear. The pond filled all the old workings, and the place had been deserted for a hundred years. Only marks of the tamping iron here and there scored the rocks, or a rusty ring-bolt hung aloft in the stone. Little else showed sign of man. The cliffs were full of ferns and sapling thorn and ash on every ledge, and in the bottom, round the water, grew briars and foxgloves and such like. 'Twas a place where ring-ousels came in spring to nest, and a patient man might sit here and hear their songs if he cared for such things.

Sam knew all about the quarry, and showed Jemima round and filled her with wonder.

"They do tell me," he said, "that the hugeous stones they took away from here was carried to London by ships over the Channel Sea and make the far famous London Bridge at this moment. 'Tis a great thought if true. And I'll tell you a greater. I read back along in the newspaper that such a fearful thing be Free Trade that you can buy granite cheaper from Norway than you can from Dartymoor. Wouldn't you call that a sin and a shame in a Christian land?"

"So I would, then," said Jemima. "And have you ever been to London, Mr. Rattery?"

"'Samuel' to you," he answered. "And I never have

been to London, and, please God, never shall go. Exeter's enough town for me. I be dazed there, along of the rail-trams and the rush and riot of the people. I never feel to draw enough air in my lungs when I go to they cities. 'Tis just the same at Plymouth, and by all accounts London would make a dozen of them ; so how the London folk live at all I couldn't tell you."

"You go to Exeter, however ? "

" Off and again—to see an old bedridden friend of my late father's. And I hope, as I tell him, that he'll be called to his reward soon, then I shan't go no more."

They got on very well together, and presently sat with their backs against a tall stone that rose up by the water. And then it come over Samuel, like a flame of fire, that it might be a terrible clever thing to cut courting and messing about, and dash at Jemima there and then ! 'Twas just one of they excitable ideas you'd look for in him, and he felt tremendous sure that if, by good chance, the woman could see it in the same way, he'd fly from the danger to come and get David down and out before the battle began.

Another man might have seen it was rather an ondacent thing to jump down the girl's throat like that, before he'd given her a chance to larn his character, or keep company in a proper and seemly fashion ; but Samuel felt he knew her pretty well already, and he didn't doubt that Thomas Snow had given Jemima a hint or two of his high purpose. So, falling silent for a bit with his eyes on the water, he at last ordained to chance his luck and dash at her. She couldn't do no worse than turn him down, or else ask for time ; so he let go and said as how she'd filled his mind for a good few months now, when he could spare thought to the subject, and that he was very wishful to start married life and couldn't but feel she'd find him a likely sort of man and able to offer her a home and comforts a bit above the common.

" I'm not much to the eye," he said, " and you're wonnerful fine and long ways prettier than any maiden I know about, but against my looks you'll have to set character and faithfulness ; so seeing that you are a cruel poor woman, with nought behind you and not much in front, it might be a fair bargain. And I do think you'd find yourself very happy and

content at Cleave, and I'd be a very fortunate man, no doubt, if you'd take me."

She didn't speak for a minute—too surprised—and he flowed on again.

"Your father, I may tell you, would approve of it, and you'd be freer than you are now to enjoy yourself; for though a poor hand at merry-making, I shouldn't deny you no fun in reason, and your friends will always be my friends. So what d'you think? It's sudden, but none the worse for that. And if you don't turn it down, perhaps you could turn it over, and if there's any questions you feel you did ought to ax—well, ax them."

A good few had offered for Jemima in her time, but nobody quite like that, and something about Samuel's blunt way, or his silly eyes, or the catch in his voice, or maybe the thought of reigning at Cleave Farm, or the private opinion that, with such a simple sort of man, she'd be grey mare, or all these ideas rolled into one, helped to make up her mind for the girl. Of course she knew from her father that it was coming, and she'd had five days to decide about it, and, as a matter of fact, she had decided. And, being a straight and downright sort of girl as knew the rough side of life exceeding well and the blessings of peace and security, she didn't pretend anything but just spoke her mind. Deep in her young heart, I dare say she'd have liked love to be a bit more romantic; but well she knew the romantic ones never had no money, and she'd seen love make a terrible poor show without it—even at Ilsington.

"We've known each other a long time," she began, "though not very well, of course; but everybody knows what you are, Mr. Rattery—'Samuel,' I should say—and I'd be a very fortunate woman to be your wife, I'm sure. Made of sense you are, and if I ban't made of it, I'm too sensible anyway to say 'No' to a man like you. I expect we'll come to love each other very well indeed presently, and I'll take you if you really think I'm good enough."

"First rate!" said Samuel. "And very pleased I feel about it. I've trembled and sweated when I've thought of this job, Jemima, and I'd reckoned to walk out till next Lady Day, or longer, afore I put the question; but something about you drew it out as you see, like a poultice draws a thorn

And I thank God that you feel addicted to me so soon. 'Twas beyond my highest hope, I assure you."

In ten minutes she was sitting on the man's knee, and in twenty they were off to Cleave, when Jemima let her eye run round the fine house-place, as she drank tea, and Samuel, above himself for the first and last time in his life, babbled out to Aunt Ann how he'd seen and conquered.

"We'm tokened," he said. "Sure as you're sitting in that chair, Jemima have took me!"

The old woman was civil and no more. She didn't seem to believe it exactly, and looked at Jemima with a good bit of doubt; but the visitor upheld her nephew and said she could hardly credit such a great happening herself. "I must get home afore dusk be down and tell my father the wonderful news," she said.

Tea turned out rather a silent meal, and as he saw Jemima part of the way back, Samuel hoped that she wouldn't feel vexed by Aunt Ann's frosty manners.

"Us have all got to remember that she had a cruel stroke of ill-fortune in her young days," he explained, "and us, who be so amazing fortunate in love seemingly, must be patient with her. Because, when she was a young woman, a gipsy told her that she'd live to have her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren at her grave, and she believed it, and hoped against hope for a husband till she was forty-five years old; and then hope died, as well it might, and she turned sour as rhubarb from that time onward. My father have told me that she was quite cheerful and pleasant to live with till the last chance failed her, and then she changed."

"Didn't nobody ever offer for her?" asked Jemima, a good bit interested in such a fatal tale.

"No," said Samuel, "not a soul; though in her late thirties she'd have took anything."

So the news went round next day that pretty Jemima Snow was tokened to Sammy Rattery, and all agreed that it looked a very fair bargain; for even if such a bowerly maid was thrown away upon the farmer, what he had got to offer wouldn't be thrown away on her.

And if Samuel had struck while the iron was hot and stood out for a marriage so soon as the banns could be run through,

it might all have gone merry as a ring of bells; but that's where the silly nature of the man threw him. He must needs have a long engagement, he said, so as they should get to know each other's weaknesses, and he ordained that round about next March, after six months were passed, would be a very clever time for the wedding.

It went all right, and the one fear of Samuel apparently proved vain, for so far as he could see, when his brother David got to know about it, he behaved so well as anybody might expect. He hid his heart, no doubt, but he kept his nerve, and when he came to know Jemima, a few days after the match was made, he seemed to play a future brother's part, and carried on very properly.

And Jemima and Samuel walked out of a Sunday and met of a week-day, when convenient, but Samuel never cared over-much for childer, so he was better pleased for his sweetheart to come to him than to go to her, among the flock of little Snows. But love her he certainly began to do, and presently, much to his surprise, he found she was going to be the apple of his eye.

She brought him out something wonderful, and improved him in a lot of ways. She made him dress nicer and take a cheerfuller conceit of himself and a brighter view of life in general, and this he actually did do after six weeks of Jemima. In fact, he got to know his luck and appreciate it. Her voice became to him the best thing in nature, and for her part she was quick to see his good points, and feel the trustworthy qualities of the man were worth more in the long run than a handsomer and cleverer partner with more to hide.

So it all looked right as rain for 'em, and then came the crash. It happened a bit after Christmas, just when the great cold snap fell on Devon, and we got a frost beyond living memory that lasted into April very near.

Samuel had been up to Exeter again, and he fetched Jemima a tokening ring with a real jool in it. A silver ring it was with a pale pink stone, and the watchmaker what he'd bought it from said it was an Italian ruby, and nobody could say it weren't. But a week after she'd got it, Jemima sent it back to Samuel with the fearful news that all was over between 'em, and she had no more use for him at all.

On a bitter, black morning in January he heard it, and the

poor soul felt as if the bottom had fallen out of life. Thinking at first that there must have happened some catastrophe to Jemima and she'd took leave of her senses, he dashed off to Ilsington ; but he didn't see her, he saw her father, and soon found the man sided against him and never wanted to see him no more. Terrible things Samuel heard, and he came away with his tail between his legs, no doubt, for so far as he could see, he must be mad himself and his world all turned upside down.

" One word will do for a thousand in a matter of this sort," said old Snow, short and sharp. " We've got to know the truth about you and your ways at Exeter, Samuel Rattery, and though we might have pardoned you if you'd confessed all and turned from evil, to think you've deceived Jemima and me, carried on with your wickedness while engaged to marry her, be a shameful scandal. I'll name but one name to you, and then you'll see I'm telling truth and nothing be hid. And that name is ' Bella Bellamy '—so now then ! "

Thomas Snow seemed to think that Samuel would drop through the earth when he heard that, but he only stared with empty wonder.

" And who the mischief be Bella Bellamy ? " he asked. " God's my judge, but I never heard tell of no such woman."

" Don't you dare to take the Name ! " roared Snow in great indignation. " Now you be adding hateful lies to your other sins. For let me tell you, when I heard of this horror I wouldn't believe it myself till I went to Exeter, and saw the woman with my own eyes, and heard how she have been your close friend for years. No better than she ought to be—the creature—but a saint compared to you."

So Samuel went his way and hung over a gate presently and watched the plovers running round the corn ricks, for the cold had drove 'em down from the moor into the valleys. He was beat, of course, and had no idea whatsoever as to the truth.

A stronger man might have took the thing by the throat and got to the bottom of it, but though he tried to do something, he was faced with silence and sour looks, and found that them who cared anything about him felt the less said the better. Nobody much was sorry for him seemingly, for the story was believed ; but when he tried to find who had started it, none could tell him. A proper outcast the poor

soul found himself; he pretty well despaired, in fact, and his weak wits turned against him, for he soon found that life without Jemima was a mighty different thing from what she'd made it. And to discover the people believed him a proper bad man, whose only pride had always been to know how good he was—that came as a facer, too. Because, in sober truth, the whole plot against him had not a shadow behind it. Never was a straighter chap; he'd not looked at a girl in his life before he saw Jemima, and to play about with a female was outside his nature.

He wilted under his misfortune, and when he found nought would change Snow, who was a most strict and God-fearing person, Samuel began to despair. He wrote thrice to Jemima, and the letters was sent back unopened, and then he tried to get his Aunt Ann to fight for him, but she refused and said she believed the fearful story, and had always thought Samuel had got a bit up his sleeve; while as for David, he pretended to be sorry for his brother; but he didn't pretend to believe him.

It was all too much for the master of Cleave. His disgrace and his loss touched his brain, and instead of doing what a better and a stronger chap would have done and fighting the thing out and getting to the bottom of it if it cost him his last penny, he threw up the sponge after a month, and said there was some unknown devil working against him and that he was a ruined man.

He couldn't eat and he couldn't think, and his poor head throbbed night and day, and the bitter cold weather, no doubt, played a part in casting him down and robbing him of his will and strength. There was none to care for the wretch, or help him against the blackguard who had planned the plot to smash him up, and things went from bad to worse with Samuel till he lost hold on reality, so to speak, and began to wonder whether he wouldn't do well to get out of it and find peace in the grave.

It all sounds silly to tell about, because 'tis hard to look into the man's mind, or think any fellow-creature could be so simple as to suffer his wrongs in silence and see no way out; but that was Samuel, and the time came presently when the little good he ever saw in life was gone. The one thing that had happened to him to make him hope fuller with exist-

ence was torn away, and he reached a state when, firstly, he didn't want to live no more, and secondly, he decided he wouldn't live no more. The fearful thought grew upon him till he was resolved to put himself away, and there came a night when he set forth to do it.

He turned over many ideas to take his life, and finally decided to go by water. He'd always hated firearms and the sight of blood, so he ordained to creep up to the quarry pool and end his days where he'd had his one great pinch of happiness, when Jemima took him there.

He hadn't been near the place since, save once with her, before she chucked him, but it seemed a happy thought to Samuel that he should die there.

"And may she live to know the bad thing she's done," prayed he.

Out he went after supper on a moony night and the frost so sharp as ever; and his Aunt Ann told David that Sam looked to be out of his mind and might soon have to be put away, and David, who had his own troubles, said the sooner the better.

And then a strange thing happened if eye of man had been able to see it, for up from Cleave to the quarry came Samuel through the white moonlight, and up from Ilsington to the quarry came Jemima Snow. But whether they was both there to do the same terrible act time would show.

Anyway, Samuel got to the place long before the woman, and; but for the watching Lord, he'd have been so good as his word and at the bottom of the pool before she stood beside it; but, silly as ever, the poor soul quite forgot that the earth had been froze to the bone for six weeks, and when he reached the water, he found a foot of ice on it and every yard of the pond so hard as a high road. All hoar and still was the silent place, and the moon making the granite glitter, and many a long beard of icicles hanging round about the precipices up over Samuel's head.

He stamped on the steely face of the ice till the rocks echoed round about, and he lost his temper and screamed out, like a bleating sheep: "Oh, my God, be I never to have no luck?"

"No luck!" said the echo to Samuel; but 'twas a lying echo, for now, at the darkest hour of his fortunes, his Maker willed that the unfortunate zany should be saved alive.

He squatted down by the great stone where Jemima had promised to marry him, and his thoughts was in a miz-maze wondering what to do next. And then, if he didn't see the source of all his troubles, for there, in the moonlight, came Jemima slipping through the quarry with quick feet, and the steam coming through her lips from her panting bosom as she hastened along.

At first he thought she was a phantom creature woke out of his brain; but he soon heard her shoes ringing on the stones and saw she was solid enough; and then he thought maybe some dreadful thing had drove her to do what he had meant to do, and wondered what her idea might be for getting out of it. But he was quite mistook there also; for she was not going to waste no time in the quarry and weren't at all the sort to shorten her days whatever happened. Then, as she slipped along, Samuel saw she could only be heading for one place, and that was Cleave Farm; so he rose up from the rock as she passed him and she heard his poor voice hoot out—like an owl with a cold on his chest.

She stopped as if she was froze, and they stared at each other, and the moon was light enough for him to see her unhappy face and for her to mark that the man looked so grim as a ghost.

Jemima kept her nerve best, and when he'd challenged her, she answered.

"Yes, it is me, Samuel. And what—what the mischief are you doing here at this time of night?"

"Looking at the ice," he said. "And what be you up to, for that matter?"

"I'm a wicked girl," answered Jemima. "A very fearful thing have happened, and I can't rest in my bed till I've spoke to you, and I was coming to do it this minute. And if you can't forgive me, Samuel, I shan't blame you, for I deserve it all."

He stared at her, and saw there were tears in her eyes. But her voice was so beautiful as ever in his ear.

"We can't stand still, because it's a thought too cold," he replied to her. "But if you've got anything to say, you can say it while I walk down along to your home with you."

"That'll do very nice," she answered.

And then, in fits and jerks, she told her tale.

"It's like this," she said. "Your brother David's a devil, and didn't ought to be allowed. A wickeder man never walked this earth, and it's him, all unknown to you, that have come between us and made me do what I did do."

"I thought 'twas somebody by the name of Bella Bellamy that had come between us," he answered. "All I know, so far, is that your father have told me I'm philandering with a female at Exeter, and he've seen the woman and won't have me inside his house no more."

"Listen, for God's love," she begged him. "Listen to every word, and then judge me. Of course, after you and me was engaged, I felt to David as if he was a brother, and he never done anything by word or deed to make me guess the villainy of the man. And when I met him walking a bit ago—just after you'd give me my ring—I showed it to him, and he laughed and he said: 'You ain't the first to wear that ring, Jimmy.'"

"Your name's 'Jemima,' I believe," said Samuel.

"So it is, then; but he calls me 'Jimmy.' And I said: 'Whatever do you mean, David?' And he said: 'Why, that's the self-same ring he gave to Bella Bellamy to Exeter!' I stared at him and said: 'What be chittering about? I never heard of no Bella Bellamy. Samuel goes to Exeter to see an old friend of his father's. He ain't got no other friends there. He hates the place.' David seemed a good bit vexed with himself then. He agreed with me and bade me forget what he'd spoke. But it weren't very likely I should do that, and I didn't want no second-hand rings you'd gived to other girls."

"May God open the ground under my feet if I ever heard of Bella Bellamy till your father named the creature," said Samuel.

"I know that now; but I didn't then, and I took the story straight to Father. He's a very stern man about behaviour, and he was coming to you instanter, and I wish he had; but that same night David dropped in, to ask me to put the matter out of my mind, and Father tackled him and got it out of him that you had a girl at Exeter and was leading a double life. And this is what the wicked man said. He said that for such an accusation, proof was before all things needful, and he begged Father to come up to Exeter and see

the girl for himself. 'She goes on in the crowd in the Exeter pantomime,' said David to Father, 'and a man friend of mine knows her, and if you want to be sure of your ground with my beastly brother'—meaning you, Samuel—'I can confront you with the girl!' And Father had business in Exeter himself two days later, so he ordained to go up with David. And he did so and met Bella Bellamy—a great, hummocking girl, in showy clothes she never paid for, and a mane of gold hair as come out of a bottle—the gold I mean. And she swore—swore, mind you—that she'd been your friend for years. And Father put a few questions to catch her; but she knew all about you, and he saw it must be true. And who shall blame him?"

"I wish I may die——" began Samuel; but she told him to be quiet.

"Listen, and talk after," she said, and then went on with her tale.

"Of course Father had no choice but to put it across you when he heard these things, and I had no choice but to drop you and send back your ring. And so it happened, and what you felt I don't know, but what I felt put on ten years to my life. Because I'd got to love you with all my heart by then. And after that another dreadful thing happened, and David, so cunning as a snake, began to make love to me! And, God forgive me! I listened to him, because he've got a pleasant voice and knows how to talk to a girl and was terrible sorry for my trouble. But never, never would I have took the wretch, for all the time, Samuel, something deep in me, which was no doubt the still small voice they tell about, kept warning me against the man.

"And then—this very morning, Samuel—me and Father went to Exeter, sent by the watching Lord no doubt, and the end of the fearful adventure happened. As we was walking down High Street looking in the shop windows, I heard somebody speak and saw a great, bold, dashing creature come up to Father and pat him familiar on the shoulder. 'You'll be Mr. Snow, I do think,' the girl said, and Father, who never forgets a face, and weren't likely to forget hers, turns round upon her. 'Don't you touch me, if you please,' he says to her. 'Yes, I am Mr. Snow, and you be Miss Bella Bellamy, and we don't want no truck with you, anyway.'

"She looked at him and then at me and seemed inclined to say something rude and leave us—a proper play-actress you could see by the way she held up her head and her way of going and her finery. But she changed her mind and turned to me. 'Was you the young person that was to marry David Rattery's brother?' she asked, and Father said: 'Yes, she was, and thank God you let her out.' 'Well,' she answered, 'don't put on no frills, old boy, and I'll tell you something to interest you.' And then she did tell us something to interest us, and 'twas such an amazing piece of news that, before we left the woman, Father had forgiven her for her crimes, and so had I."

"And what was her crimes, then?" asked Samuel, a good bit excited by now.

"She knew David very well indeed," continued Jemima, "and had known him a longful time; but, of course, she didn't know you—never. But his game was to get up a plot with her against you, so as your visits to Exeter should be explained, and she was ready to do anything for a bit of fun and a bit of money—especially the money. He told her just exactly what you was like, down to the kick in your speech, and larned her what to say, and then he plotted to overthrow you and bring Father up to listen to Miss Bellamy's lies. And being a play-actress, of course they sounded like truth, as she knew well how to make 'em.

"But as Father said, coming home: 'The mills of God grind slow, but small,' and since that wicked affair she'd fallen out with David, because now she'd done what he wanted, he'd cooled off a lot, and she thought he might be after somebody else. She wouldn't have done nothing about it, having plenty to think of in her doubtful manner of life at the theatre and all; but seeing Father, brought it back to her and, on the spur of the moment, she stopped him and gave the show away, to get even with David. And that's all there is to it, Samuel, and I couldn't have closed my eyes to-night till I'd seen you and asked you to forgive me. Of course you won't take me now—I well know that, and so does Father. 'Tis beyond Christianity to ask such a thing. But if you can see your way to forgive me, being such a forgiving sort as you are, I shall bless your name so long as I live."

Samuel didn't answer very quick. He thought for a bit,

and then he said: "Now I'll ax you to say it all over again from the beginning, Jemima; because such a dark and devilish tale as this can't be understood at one telling."

Well, 'twas hateful for the girl to do that, because you don't feel like saying a long story all over again after you've worked yourself up same as she had. But she went at it once more, and, being the solemn truth in every particular, it come out just the same second time, and even worse. And by then they was at her home.

"I won't come in," said Samuel; "but I'll very likely step down-along and see you and your father to-morrow, Jemima. And I forgive you, and as to the rest I'll turn it over."

Well, knowing him, she slept pretty comfortable, and when he got home, Sammy found his brother hadn't gone to bed, but was poking about, anxious like, waiting for him to return. 'Twas very near two o'clock in the morning by then. And David didn't hide a disappointed look when his brother came along.

"What be you doing down house?" asked Samuel.

"Waiting for you," said Dave. "I half hoped you'd gone and killed yourself perhaps—such a mournful wretch you be nowadays and good for nought."

"No," answered Samuel, "I ban't the sort of man to kill myself, I believe, and we'll see who'll be the mournful wretch to-morrow. And this I may tell you for you to sleep on, that your wicked friend to Exeter have confessed all. Her name being Miss Bellamy by all accounts. And if you don't take your money, so soon as I can find it, and leave this place for a foreign land in two months from now, I'll lock you up with the rogues where you belong."

David made a lot of noise after that, and Miss Rattery poked her head down from top floor; but Samuel drew himself half a pint of beer and scorned the pair of 'em.

It all fell out very comfortable just like that; for when his sin was known, David found it might be better to make a new start. He got five hundred pounds of his father's money, and went to Canada with it, to take up State-aided land; and Samuel had Jemima back—but not in no great hurry—and wedded her next Eastertide. She never seemed to settle down exactly comfortable at Cleave, however, till old Ann Rattery died, a year or two later. Then she came out from behind a cloud and grew so happy as a heath-lark.

THE CURSE

THE CURSE

When Solomon Blight killed his wife a good few people in Daleham took a dislike to the man ; because though sometimes, when a wife goes off sudden, the folk may feel they can forgive the husband pretty easy, in the case of poor Minnie Blight they could not. There's some murders you don't get hanged nor yet locked up for, and Solomon didn't use no hatchet to his poor girl, nor put poison in her tea, nor nothing like that. What he done was to break her heart, all lawful and regular, and bring her down and down by hard words and unseen cruelty till she didn't want to go on living no more. And at two-and-thirty she died, what doctors call a natural death. Glad to go, so she told a woman friend or two who kept with her to the last ; and her only remaining care was her little boy, six year old or thereabout.

And old Mrs. Mogridge, generally known as " Mother Moggs," promised Minnie that she'd do what she could to try and get little Billy Blight away from his father after she was took.

You may say that Minnie paid with her life for the one error of her life ; because when Solomon Blight came courting her, she fell in love with his fine appearance and wouldn't believe her parents, who'd always begged and prayed of her to give him up. He had his own boat, and in them days did well enough and kept sober most times ; but his record was bad—he'd been in gaol more'n once for fishing in restricted waters, and once he'd hit down a coast-guardsman who catched him, and broke the officer's arm.

A big, swarthy chap was Solomon, bold as a hawk and no better to be trusted. " Blueskin " everybody called him, because his chin and his cheeks, which he shaved clean, were blue. But his hair was black and his eyes were dark

and savage-looking, and he had a mouth like a dogfish. He hung on to Minnie, whose parents were very well to do, because he guessed they'd come round after their daughter was wed ; and she also believed they would relent, and so she fell in with his scheme, poor fool, and ran away and married the man, in a North Devon port, while his trawler was round land fishing the North Channel.

But Blight reckoned without Farmer Bassett and his wife, for they disowned Minnie afterwards, said she was no longer child of theirs, and they never lifted a finger to her no more. They knew what she was suffering too, because so soon as Solomon found out her people had done with her, he turned on Minnie and treated her very wicked indeed. But such was the hardness of her father's heart to his own flesh and blood that she couldn't get forgiveness, and old Bassett wouldn't let his wife help the poor girl either.

The feeling of the public, however, was made clear to 'em rather painfully when Minnie went to her rest ; for the night that followed the sad creature's funeral witnessed a bit of a flare-up in Daleham. 'Twas Saturday, and a good lot of fishermen had come home for the week-end as usual ; and a bit after closing time, when "The Red Admiral" and "The Sailors' Welcome" and others had emptied, a few bold chaps smashed all the windows in Sol Blight's cottage front, and a dozen others went up over to Bassett's farm on the cliffs, fired a rick, and did one or two other lawless deeds—just to show they didn't hold with the way farmer and his wife had looked on and watched Blueskin snuff out their only daughter.

Altogether a very shameful affair, and a bad mark against Daleham all round ; but I never heard that anybody shed no tears about it ; and the local police, though so clever as most men in their calling, didn't hurt themselves trying to catch the evil doers. In fact, not a man among 'em ever was catched, though old Bassett offered five pounds for information of the offenders.

Blueskin was drunk the night after they buried Minnie, and by good chance Mrs. Mogridge had took his little son to her home for the night, so he weren't frightened by the window smashing. She thought, of course, that Billy's father would be only too glad to get rid of him ; but she was

wrong there, for the contrary man swore he was going to keep his son and make a fisherboy of him. He dared anybody to take the child away, and the law upheld him in that matter; but when he made an enemy of Mother Moggs, it was agreed by all that he'd done a foolish deed, because the old woman had a will of iron and more than that: she was reckoned to know a bit more than most, and believed to have secret ways of getting even with them who crossed her.

She had got old and shaky when Mrs. Blight died, but her blue eyes could see through a millstone yet, and she knew human nature inside out. It was said she had put a murrain on Farmer Bassett's cattle long ago; and when Solomon Blight lost his trawl thrice in a year, few doubted but that Mother Moggs had worked it, for I'm telling of a time more than half a century past, when people believed a lot more than they'll hold to nowadays. And so Mrs. Mogridge had a doubtful reputation in some quarters, and Blueskin hated her very hearty indeed; and when she came before him with proposals to take Billy off his hands, he insulted her shocking, and spoke evil to her and told her that if ever she laid a finger on his child he'd strangle her.

"You'm a baggering old witch," said Solomon, "and if you had your rights, you did ought to be ducked in the harbour and burned after; and if I catch you near my son, or trying to overlook me or do any harm to my boat, I'll take the law in my own hands against you."

She kept her temper with the coarse creature, and tried to get parson to help her; but none could do nought, for the law was on Sol's side, and so soon as Billy's father found the general opinion ran that the child should be took away from his keeping, he swore it shouldn't happen. And it didn't happen. But then fell out the deep, strange thing that made talk for many months and was the subject of such wonderful arguments at "The Red Admiral" and "The Sailors' Welcome." It even got into the newspapers also —a thing Daleham don't often do. I never heard no such tale afore myself, and I'm sure don't want to listen to another like it; but far the most curious part for me is that I was in the thick of it all myself, yet never knowed the fearful rights of the story till long years after.

There came a winter evening, and Solomon Blight, who always worked hard enough when he wasn't drunk, ordained to go out to the Devil's Rocks and try for conger-eels. The Rocks lie a mile and a half to westward of Daleham Harbour, and more than one well-found sailing craft in my time have met her fate there ; while in old days they tell me a ship was cast away upon 'em pretty near every year. But inside the ridge be a proper wonnerful place for conger, and sometimes between whiles, when the big trawlers are in harbour and nothing much doing on the deep sea for four-and-twenty hours, men will pull rowing boats out to the rocks, if the weather allows, and try their luck.

Conger, like pollock and other fish, be best in winter, and a pollock till he have got his winter coat on after October ban't worth eating, in my judgment. So, on a still even in December, just as the reds was in the sky and Daleham's windows all afire in the sunset, Blueskin and the mate of his trawler, *The Night Hawk*, ordained to put in a few night hours behind the Devil's Rocks. Their dinghey was at the quay side, and Johnny Tapper, Sol's mate, had got the fishing lines and gear for his partner and was talking to a few men loafing under the lighthouse.

The sun went down and night came fast, but still Blueskin didn't show, and Johnny was just going in to the "Welcome" up the quay to find him, when he see the other man come out. Sol braced himself as he smelt the fishy air, but t'other saw he'd had more than enough. He could carry a lot of drink, however, and John knew that, once he was in the boat, he'd be all right.

Then there happened what might have been an ugly accident, for just as Solomon started to get his legs in order there comed an old woman past him. 'Twas Mother Moggs, and she glowered at the man and spit on the ground, which she always did do when she passed him. In his anger at her insult he forgot his balance, and afore she could get clear he lurched against her. Both was on the quay at the time, and of course the woman, light as a dead stick, went heels over head when Blueskin's twelve stone touched her. She fell anyhow, and her stick flew out of her hand as she dropped within inches of the quay edge.

Only a bollard saved her falling ten feet into deep water.

"That'll larn you to spit at me, you hen devil!" shouted the fisherman.

Then he tried to go on, but Mother Moggs was up in a moment and barred his way. Her blue eyes flashed and her old jaw worked, and she spat in earnest now, like a savage cat, and breathed out fire and fury on the man.

"You murdering, drunken wretch!" she screamed. "To Hell with you—to Hell with you, where you belong! Go, get out to sea, you hateful dog! Get out to sea and throw your line and catch your death, Solomon Blight! Throw your line and catch your death!"

A child had picked up her stick, and the furious old creature snatched it and clattered off, while Blueskin, a bit sobered, stared after her, and a few men laughed at him. But Johnny Tapper didn't laugh. He was a religious man, and very steady and straight, and he believed that there might be a good deal more to the old woman's cussin' than his partner thought. In fact, John went so far as to advise Blueskin that he'd best not go to sea.

"A cuss is a cuss," he said. "There may be nothing to it, and, again, there may be a darned sight more to it than you think for. You'll be better ashore, anyway, to-night."

"Shut your mouth and come on!" answered Sol.

But Tapper wouldn't shut his mouth, nor yet come on.

"You'll do as you please," he answered; "but if you go to sea to-night, you'll go alone. 'Throw your line and catch your death,' that's what Mother Moggs screamed at you; and if you catch your death, then supposing I was along in the boat with you, I'd very like catch mine too. And I ain't taking no chances—a man with a wife and family!"

"You're a tea-swilling coward, and I've done with you," said Blueskin. "I'd have thought you had more manhood in you than to be feared of an old mangy monkey like her."

Then he went down the steps and got into his boat, while Johnny replied to him.

"You know very well I'm no coward," he told t'other. "If you call home what happened to *The Night Hawk*

coming round the Wolf Light last March, you'll remember I ain't no coward; but a cuss is a cuss, and I ban't going fishing to-night with you, whether or not. And you're a fool to go yourself."

Some as heard sided with Johnny, and some did not; but nought would make him budge or change his mind, and after a good bit of crooked language against Tapper, Solomon Blight dipped the oars and pulled his dinghey out through the harbour heads to the west.

The last of the dimpsey light was on the ocean by now, and the Devil's Rocks ran like a row of black and broken teeth sticking out of a rose-coloured sea. But the light soon faded away and the stars came out; and so still was it on the famous conger grounds that you could hardly hear the whisper of the water round the rocks.

Sol was steady and sober by this time, and he soon made fast inside the ridge, where ran a good ten fathom of water under him. Then he baited his hooks with cuttle-fish. To brass wire the hooks were bent, for a conger will bite through the stoutest line ever wove of hemp.

So he set to his fishing while darkness came down, but not a breath in the air, nor scarce a ripple on the water. Blueskin lit his pipe, dropped his lines fore and aft and turned his thoughts ashore to Johnny Tapper. So far he felt no fear of the angry old woman's nonsense; but as he cooled down and the drink faded out of his head he minded her wrath, and the wicked look in her blue eyes, and the doubtful name she'd got for being cleverer than her neighbours.

The western sky faded to a dusky green over the sea and land; and then, out of the east, a dim shadow rose up and presently sailed aloft and flung down flakes of light upon the sea. 'Twas the moon, and Blueskin always reckoned that a frosty and moony night together found the black congers, which dwelt amid the fangs of the rocks, at their hungriest.

A little schooner, *The Morning Star*, had run on the reef in a gale during the last spring, and three men and a boy were drowned there; so the great eels were man-eaters very like. "And if they'd eat one man, they'd eat another," thought Sol suddenly. It gave him a bit of a shiver, I

dare say; but he put the cuss behind him, lighted his lantern, and presently began to catch some heavy fish. For seven hours, however, nothing bigger than a six-pound conger came to the man's hooks, and he began to consider going home. But then, just as all fear had passed off and he was only aware of a great new thirst upon him, the proper, dark business of the night began.

Then it was that, like an echo from nowhere, the cuss came back to Sol. Nobody spoke it—not a bird flying, nor a wave beating, nor yet the night wind in the great rocks, but none the less he heard it: "Throw your line and catch your death!"

"Damn the hag!" shouted Sol aloud; and there came back a live echo this time, for off the face of the stone sounded back the words clean and clear. "Damn the hag!" said the rocks. And a minute after that a gentler sound came over the sea, for Daleham church clock told midnight, and the bells rang out "Rock of Ages," as they always did at that hour. A tramp steamer went up Channel three miles out, and Sol heard the chug of the screw; and then he heard something else. The line at his bows gave a sharp twang, like a banjo string, and he felt it whipping and throbbing in the water. That was the pleasantest music of all for him, and he jumped forward in his skiff to handle the line. And then he found a proper, tremendous strain upon it, and a great, unknown creature fighting so heavy and so strong as if it would tow the boat.

From that moment Sol forgot the cuss as though he'd never heard it. He was all fisherman now, and thought of nothing but the huge fellow below. Money was down there—live money—but not to be counted upon till he'd played his part and got it in his boat and knocked the great sea-snake's life out of it.

For he knew from the first it was a black conger. Big flat fish, however large they run, don't make such a devil of a business of being caught as the giant eels. Congers be the tigers of the Channel, in fact, so Sol knew he was in for a fight. And a fight there was—a proper pull-devil, pull-baker under the moon, with the great rocks flinging back the noise. For a time Blueskin could make no impression whatever on his fish, and he guessed the creature had wound

itself round rocks beneath, to resist the pull from above; but a steady strain told at last; the line shot away and cut his hand through its horny skin as it did so. He soon gripped it again and knew the eel was up. Once get it off the bottom, then, if his gear held, the end was only a question of time, so he reckoned.

But every foot of that line meant a tussle, and presently the man made fast round a seat to rest a minute. As he did so his hemp sang again, and he heard a mighty splash, and knew the conger was on top for a look round. He hauled in the slack so fast as he was able, and when the great fish tried to dive once more, it found it couldn't. So it fought and lashed out and beat the water till it boiled; and Sol heard the grunt of it, so loud as a pig.

Still he didn't know what he was in to, and felt no pang of fear; but presently, when the creature was near enough, he got his lantern and lifted it high to see if he could sight it. Then suddenly it churned almost alongside, and in the smother of broken water, red with the lantern light and white under the moon, he saw something that curdled his innards and made him very near drop his light.

All in a blaze and fighting like a proper demon was a thing that wound and knotted and writhed and looked full twenty feet long! The lantern and the moon flashed over it—a black conger, sure enough, but such a conger as neither Blueskin nor any other Daleham man had ever seen—a proper Hell fish, bred in the deep sea caves and fattened, no doubt, on dead men.

For a moment Mother Moggs's cuss came into Sol's mind, and he felt mighty like cutting his line and letting the monster go—if it would. But his fight was more than half fought, and his blood was up, and he told himself not to be a white-livered fool and chuck away a ton of good money at an old woman's threat.

The fish floated now, stretched out and motionless like a tree in the water; so he took his time, got his gaff ready and an axe from the locker. Then he coaxed the great, dusky thing nearer and nearer. It came in slow and heavy, like a long black spar, and, thinking it exhausted, Sol waited until its length rolled beside the boat; then he steadied himself, and finally stabbed in the gaff, deep and hard, half

a foot below the gills. He meant to hold it in this fashion with his right hand, while he beat in its head with his left holding the axe. That done, he'd be able to drag the monster aboard ; but there were two to this plan, and the eel, fairly gaffed, went mad, and showed a bit more of its tremendous power. It began to resist again with every inch of its carcass, and the line, catching in a thole-pin, snapped like a cotton thread.

Another minute and Sol would have lost him ; but 'twas now or never, so he held on to the gaff with both hands, put all his great strength to one effort, and lifted the head and belly of the conger clear of the sea. At the same minute the rocking of the boat sent the lantern overboard, and the gaff, unequal to such a strain, snapped short, while the fisherman fell backwards into the well of his craft. But five feet of the conger had come too. Its tail followed the head and body, and the whole great, slithering creature fell atop of Blueskin, coil on coil.

He felt a ring, so cold as ice, tighten about his leg then, and he heard a hissing in his ear and listened to the tail of the brute lashing now one side, now the other, as if it would stave in the ribs of the boat. He tried to get a grip on its body between his hands, but the fish was a lot too slippery and too strong for that. It twisted and wriggled and beat him over the neck and face and seemed to throw a coil round every limb ; then, struggling to rise and get clear, the man put his hands upon its head, and it fastened like a rat-trap on his fingers and bit him to the bone.

Blight swore then, and hit out madly while the fish still quivered and writhed round him in black festoons, and made strange, ugly sounds, as though cussing back in its own language. If the monster had happened to have had a spoonful of brains it could have killed Blueskin all right, but the Lord have denied such fantastic creatures more wits than enough to keep 'em safe in their own homes, and the fisherman knowed now that if he only kept his nerve and his temper he ought to come out on top. He fought clear presently, bruised and bleeding, and slobbered with cold slime from his face to his boots. He'd had a blow across the eyes that very near blinded him, and he was shaking with such a passion of rage that he could hardly steady his

hands to feel for a match. But the conger was off him, down in the bottom of the boat for a minute, and Sol pulled himself together, while his craft got to an even keel again and the echoes of his swear words died upon the rocks.

For a minute all was still as the grave, and then the chap got a match burning and found his little axe forward in the bows. But he kept his eye turned over his shoulder the while lest the creature should attack from behind. Then he struck another match and held it above him, and then he marked the great eel in the bottom of the boat coiled up with a proper tangle of ropes and fishing lines and an overturned bait-can and scraps of white squid thrown everywhere, shining like silver money under the moon.

He could see the enemy's great head now, glaring up wicked and watchful out of the mess. It was gasping and its gills opening and shutting like a sluice, and its snout and sides were bloody from the stroke of the gaff. And he saw its round eyes like balls of fire, but he said after that there was only fear in the conger's face now—terror of death—for it knew it had met its master.

So Blueskin had got the monster at his mercy at last, and all there was left to do was to kill it. And he looked forward to that a lot. He crept over, and quickly pinned its long body firm under a few blocks of ballast, and then he took his axe and hammered its head to pulp and laughed like a maniac till the rocks rang again. He beat the creature long after it had given its last shiver, and then he dropped his axe and threw himself down beside the dead thing, panting and exhausted.

He smoked a pipe after that and rested and let the night dry his sweat; and presently, already pretty stiff and sore after the battle, he tied up his wounded hand, cleaned himself with sea water, made the boat so ship-shape as he could by moonlight, and then drew in his mooring rope and cast off. A thin breeze was moving by now, and Sol set up his mast and lug sail; then he lighted his pipe again and got moving.

His only sorrow was that Daleham would be to bed and nobody see his great triumph till morning. The boat moved and the wind whispered over his head. Down under his feet lay the mass of the black eel, and now and again Sol

bent and touched it to make sure it was still there. Two tacks he took and then came creeping in under a green light that marked the harbour mouth. He downed sail, pulled in and out among the empty trawlers riding at anchorage, and so got to the quay, where a policeman lent him a hand, listened to his wonderful yarn and helped him to bring the fish ashore.

But the officer didn't set much faith on what Solomon Blight told him, for the fisherman talked about Mother Moggs's curse, and how, but for his own strength and skill and courage, the conger must have slain him ten times over, and how Mother Moggs did ought to be hung for a murderess and so on.

"You be a bit above yourself seemingly," said the policeman. "'Tis a fearful and wonderful fish without a doubt, and it must have put up a pretty good fight by the looks of you, but you get home and calm down, Blueskin, and us'll hear tell about it in the morning."

So Sol went his way to his house, and drank half a bottle of whisky afore he turned in.

The next morning the eel was the centre of excitement from one end of Daleham to the other. Not the oldest among the people had ever seen anything like it afore, and such was the monster's fame that many travelled a good few miles to see it. Sol's conger got in the papers also, being the heaviest creature of that species ever known in Devon, though Cornish men, as be always jealous of Devonshire men, swore that bigger eels had come out of their waters. Anyway, the creature was very near fifteen feet long and weighed a hundred and forty pounds and over; and the owner made a show of it, and took it round Daleham on a hand-barrow, and netted a good few shillings that way, and then he sold it in open market and got £5 for the carcass.

He kept two pounds of the tail for his own dinner, because he said he'd like to have a bite off the beggar that had took a bite off him, and he made a lot of noise up and down the village and was very pleased with himself. But he held to it most steadfast that Mrs. Mogridge had worked a charm against him, and he swore that if the eel had run a bit bigger, and he hadn't proved himself such a valiant hero, her cuss would have come true and he'd have thrown

his line and catched his death sure enough. And he didn't forget to laugh at Johnny Tapper either, and tell the man he was a poor ninny-hammer, not fit to go netting white-bait, let alone deep-sea fish.

But I can't say as Blueskin got much applause, for he was hated at the best of times, and a very hatch-mouthed man ; and, anyway, the people thought he'd come well out of it with all that big money for his trouble. His eyes were both black next morning where the conger had smote him and his hand had a tidy wound upon it ; but he was all right, and went to his dinner in a very cheerful frame of mind, and declared himself quite ready to take his trawler to sea as usual on the evening tide.

A woman as did his housework for him cooked the conger, and his little lad, full of excitement at the great adventure, sat down to the table along with him and had a bite of the fish also. And Sol ate and bragged and drank and said he'd have another fine bit of fishing at the Devil's Rocks afore long. He was in a merry mood that morning, and young Billy felt so happy as need be to see his father cheerful and to get a grin from him instead of a smack on the ear, which was what he most often got. So they stuffed, and the child chattered and got merry, as childer will when they're full of victuals. For such food as would make you or me mighty thoughtful, only goes to childer's heads and turns 'em lively as crickets.

But now Billy had something to laugh at, for his father did a comical thing and made the child shout with laughter.

" Funny daddy ! " he said.

For just as Blueskin was putting away the last of the eel with his fork and stretching out t'other hand for his mug of beer, he dropped the fork with a rattle and clapped both hands to his throat, and goggled his eyes as if he'd seen a ghost. And Billy laughed and laughed, while his father jumped up and shook his head like a bulldog and made such comical sounds that the kid could hardly contain himself.

Then his father began to get wild, and thrust his fingers down his throttle, and his face seemed to grow and puff out like a toadstool, and turn redder and redder. He fell back off his chair the next minute, and screeched so loud as a

seagull ; and then he began to beat the stone floor with his fists, and roll and turn and twist and tie himself in knots, same as the black conger had.

But by that time little William had given over laughing and grown a thought feared.

" Stop, daddy ! Stop, daddy ! " he began crying out. Then he found himself frightened, and felt there must be something a bit wrong with his parent. He dursn't go near the kicking man, but he jumped off his chair and screamed for help. And then he ran down the passage and op'ed the door and went out in the street and yelled for all he was worth.

It happened that John Tapper was coming up to see Blight at the moment, and the child ran to him and tried to explain.

" Daddy's rolling over on the floor and his face be gone black, Mister Tapper," he whimpered ; so the fisherman, guessing his skipper had got drunker than usual, went in the house to look after him. But he didn't find no Blueskin, only the carcass of the man, for he'd gone out of it afore Johnny got to him ; he lay still enough now, and his troubles were ended.

A crowd of neighbours were soon swarming round the place, and they fetched the doctor to him ; but he couldn't do nought except explain what had overtook the unfortunate chap.

You see, gulching his food, Sol had let down one of the spine bones of the conger, and this here bone wedged good and hard between the air of life and his breathing parts. So he had to choke to death, because only a skilled hand could have saved him, the doctor said. He'd been strangled, in fact, and that was all there was to it.

I'm afraid that none cared over much about the tragical finish of Sol ; but the people looked a bit doubtful at Mother Moggs afterwards, for Johnny Tapper told all about the famous cuss, and it showed that, do what he might, Blueskin wasn't going to escape from it. He'd thrown his line and catched his death all right and nobody could deny it. Folk thought more of wonders and mysteries sixty year agone than what they do now ; and though few tears were dropped for Solomon Blight, the folk did take mighty

good care to keep civil when they had anything to do with Mrs. Mogridge.

But she was innocent enough, of course, poor soul, and had only spoke in a temper after Solomon rolled her over. She took charge of little Billy Blight from that day forward, and no child had a better or kinder foster-mother. And well I remember her; and too well, after more'n half a century, I can call home my poor father's sudden and fearful death, though only up six years old at the time.

Yes, I be William Blight, and very well thought on and very successful and respectable, thank God! A fisherman also by trade, but not one of my three sons have took after the sea. Along of modern education, they choose to bide where the money is, and that's ashore.

HUNTER'S CROSS

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NELLY BAMSEY comed into five hundred pounds when her aunt, Mrs. Foster, died; and though the young men of Ponsworthy hadn't been much drawn towards her before that happened, she growed a bit more interesting to 'em when the news was told.

A very good girl indeed, and a tower of strength to her family; but, regarded as a wife, a thought too flat in the bosom and too weak in the eyes for the male sex inclined to matrimony. For the way of youth is to put comeliness first and leave the virtues to chance. The young man isn't born yet who understands that the brightest light do often shine out of the plainest candlestick, where maidens are concerned.

Nelly was thirty years old when her fortune fell to her, and with her natural good sense, it wasn't likely she'd fail to see through the change in her men acquaintance. But she didn't let no unkind thoughts spoil her temper, and very well understood she'd want a little bit more than herself to attract a husband.

Her stepmother, who wasn't a very kind sort of woman, said Nelly was the sort as be given away with a pound of tea; but now she'd got her pound Mrs. Bamsey hoped the good girl would find her market and her own home.

And though ordained by nature for one of they women who help the mothers and do plenty of work for other people's children without the advantages of married life, yet she reckoned on the whole it might be a wise thing to leave her stepmother and her half-sister, Jane—a spoiled little toad of a girl, fifteen year old and the apple of her mother's eye. And Nelly's grandfather on her father's side—old Joe Bamsey, the cleverest man in Ponsworthy, advised her to seek a husband, which she did

do, though circumstances unfortunately inclined her to take but half Joe's tip. And if she'd took the whole of it, she might have been a happier woman than she is at this minute, because Joe, knowing Nelly's qualities very well, understood she wouldn't be likely to win a young man save through her cash, whereas a man up in sight of middle age, with experience behind him and the lust of the eye cooled down a bit, might be far more likely to make her happy and take care of her nest egg.

But the wisest man goes down when love's the matter, and so does the most sensible woman ; and when a creature like Nelly, without experience of the men, suddenly finds a very good-looking young fellow deeply interested in her and hears him say 'tisn't her cash but herself that's drawing him, she's often tempted past the strength of her wits to withstand.

And so it fell out, for of the two or three who now set off to capture Nelly, one only stood a chance ; and when Joe Bamsey's friend, Ned Cleave, son of Farmer Cleave and a widower with four children, turned his attention to her, at her grandfather's secret advice, he very soon found that Nelly's mind was already full of another and a younger man. Not that he knew who the younger man was—more did anybody else for that matter ; and that was the first thing that made old Joe anxious for her. Nelly wasn't a secret or sly girl, and the fact that she presently turned down two who offered for her, and made it clear to Ned Cleave she'd got no use for him neither, caused her few friends some anxiety.

It was fairly clear to be seen the man, whoever he might be, didn't want Nelly to make him known ; but against that others argued that she might not have decided about the chap, and was taking her time to accept him.

The puzzle was to know where her thought turned, and when she went to tea with old Joe, and he axed her straight out, to his surprise, she begged him to change the subject. So, of course, he did, being a very nice old man. I can see him yet, with little eyes, still bright for all his eighty years, a round back, and legs like a spider, so thin were they in the yellow leggings he wore summer and winter. His teeth were gone, and he had a little mouth like a baby ; but it

spoke wisdom when he opened it, and his sense was never frosty, as sense is apt to be, for he had a large understanding of human nature and a very rare knack to turn tears into laughter.

So he let Nelly bide and, fearing danger for her, kept his little eyes open about it, though he knew all the time that the young can cheat the old if they be minded to do so, and he guessed already that it was the man, not the woman, had imposed silence.

And that suspicion led him to turn over the secret sort of men we had among us. There were but two and as one was married, there weren't no peril in his direction for a girl like Nelly Bamsey; but there remained one—a foreigner, who'd come to Ponsworthy a year before and said he was a native of Exeter, and had left the city and turned to the country for his health's sake.

Arthur Ball was his name—a good-looking, loose-limbed fellow of twenty-five, or thereabout. He lived with that old woman-hater, Jarvis Toms, at Lizwell Farm, and though he'd been there a year, Toms knew little about him more than that he was a very good man on the land and stood to work and could be trusted both with cattle and sheep. At any rate, that was all he ever said concerning Ball, and when Dicky Richards left Lizwell at seventy-eight year old, Toms lifted Arthur Ball up to be his head man. And sure enough, though it took a proper conjuring trick to find it out, Arthur was the favoured party, and 'twas him had wooed and won Nelly, all secret as the grave and with enough cunning for a barrow-load of monkeys. She couldn't have told herself, I believe, how he got round her, but in that heavily wooded country, people met easy and often, with no eye upon 'em but their Maker's, and doubtless Arthur Ball got to know of her ways as easy as he got to know of her legacy. She was acquainted with him, because they'd met at Lizwell and Ponsworthy, for Toms was an old friend of the Bamseys, and Arthur came and went about farm business.

Truth didn't out for a long time, and us wouldn't know nothing till this day, very like, but for Providence, as used a terrible strange tool in the matter to bring the man and woman's secret to the light at the appointed hour.

It began with Arthur giving Nelly a bit of friendly advice. They met in the vale, and she was going up over to Buckland for her stepmother, who wanted a thatcher, and Arthur was going there likewise on an errand for Mr. Toms. He looked down at her out of the corner of his eye and having helped her over the stile in a very gentlemanly way, he said:

"'Tis no business of mine, Miss Bamsey, but I'll risk vexing you for friendship. I've knowed you off and on for six months and, of course, I've heard of your windfall, and none better pleased than me about it. But I'm much older than you, and I venture very respectful to warn you against them that will be running after you."

She was flattered by him saying he was older than her.

"No need," she answered. "I see through 'em. None wanted me afore my money came, so I shall know very well why they do who come now."

"I don't say that. They're an ignorant lot round here,—in fact, I never met such poor-brained men. But you mustn't tar all with the same brush. I am only troubled for the minute because I know a widower with childer wants you—why, I'll leave it to you to guess. And, as a man with nice feelings, I can't see that going on and not feel sore about it. If you'll excuse me, money or no money, you're a lot too fine to take up with another woman's leavings in the shape of a widow man and four brats."

Nelly Bamsey felt surprised, for here was a chap as had never been known to look at the maidens. He was always dumb in company, and not a girl in Ponsworthy, nor yet Poundsgate, had ever got a smile from him. In fact, he was rumoured to echo his master, and Toms had said more'n once at the "Gun and Man" that the Lord had sent him a woman-hater like himself, which was a great source of contentment to him.

Now the woman laughed.

"You mean my grandfather's friend, Neddy Cleave, I expect," she said.

"I may, or I may not," he answered. "I mention no names, but I venture to hope that when the right man comes along, he'll be a bachelor and well to do, and your own generation. If he's got more money than you have,

then he may be straight and want to marry you for your good and famous qualities ; but if he can't show a thousand for your five hundred, don't you have nothing to do with him, Miss Bamsey."

" Now, I dare say that's very good advice," she granted. And I'll keep it in mind whether or no."

" Don't you say I gave it to you, however," he went on. " I'm in Ponsworthy, 'tis true, but, between ourselves, I hold myself a bit higher than the people round here. I come of good havage, and I've got ideas and plenty of money. So have you got ideas, for I've heard you say some far-reaching things with a lot of sense to them."

Nelly returned compliments for his.

" Grandfather says you're a bit out of the common by virtue of your gift of silence," she answered.

" I can talk when there's anybody about worth talking to," he said.

" So it seems," she replied to him.

And they climbed the long hill very amiably till she got a bit daring and asked him what he used to do at Exeter before he came and lived in the country.

" As to that," he said, " perhaps I'll tell you some day, if you're interested. My life has been a very remarkable one, and I've done pretty well everything a man of courage can do except fall in love. But no woman ever tempted me to take a wife, though between ourselves more'n one have tried."

" I dare say they have," she said.

For he was a very good-looking chap, with a sort of good looks you don't find in a labourer. In fact Nelly, in her heart, reckoned he must have been a shopman. But it wasn't for her to say more, except express a polite wonder that he'd never seen the girl good enough. He changed the subject then, and asked her about herself, though not in a tone of voice as if he cared, and since Nelly hadn't ever had a secret in her life up to that fateful day, she told him how it was, and how she was very fond of her grandfather, but hadn't got no use for her stepmother, and hoped, God willing, to have a home of her own afore very long.

He thought 'twas a very wise intention.

" But as a friend, if I may call myself a friend, I beg you

not to be in a hurry," he said. "You can well afford to take your time, and, for my part, I only wish I knew a clever and high-minded man in these parts who'd be worthy of you."

He put a lot of ideas into the woman's head, you see, and began by making her have a cheerfuller conceit of herself; for there's nothing more crafty in some men than the skill by which they teach a maiden to take herself seriously, before they start on her to take them so. He lifted Nelly to a sort of pride in herself she'd never felt till that hour, and he knew—the sly dog—that once she got to feel like that she'd look at him with kindly eyes, as the first man who'd seen her greatness and showed it to her.

Then Arthur Ball felt, no doubt, he'd done enough for a start, and though she, simple like, said she'd be walking home again in an hour, he didn't take the hint. He only begged her to honour him by considering what he'd spoke, and hoped also she'd pay him the compliment of not naming his name to a soul.

"I couldn't stand having my name handed about on common tongues," he said; "and I know you'll respect it, even if you don't see your way to follow what I've ventured to say. I wouldn't have done so much for any other girl, and it's not at all like me, really, to go out of my way same as I have done."

She liked him calling her a girl, of course, but laughed and told him she was thirty. Whereupon he stared with great amaze and swore that if he'd had the faintest idea she was so much he'd never have presumed to advise her. Then he went his way and didn't suggest they should meet again and, of course, left her a good bit interested in him and a bit flattered too.

Needless to say, he met her again "by accident" a fortnight later; and then again.

For a man as never had exchanged more than a word off and on with the female sex, there's no doubt Arthur Ball knew a lot about 'em. At any rate, he found the way to get round Nelly Bamsey, and when, somewhere about Christmas, he told her that she'd changed his life and made it worth living, though he'd long given up hoping it ever would be, and so on, she believed every word, because by

that time she had reached the stage of doting on the man's voice, and every turn of his head and movement of his hand. And when she found that he wasn't too good for her, but reckoned she was the one on earth to make him a happy man, she believed it and went as love-struck as a green girl of seventeen. The other men who were after her looked cloam to Ball's china in her eyes, and as for Neddy Cleave, when he offered again for her, she gave him a bit of Arthur's wisdom and told that she didn't see her way to another woman's leavings. In fact, her head was turned without a doubt. She lived in a fool's paradise, and no bigger fool ever did.

Knowing both parties, 'twas easy to forgive her, but Cleave never did so; for the line she took with him hurt the man's self-respect; while as for the others, 'tis doubtful if any went so far as to propose marriage when they found how much Nelly Bamsey had changed, and what a deuce of a value she set on herself. Everybody thought 'twas the five hundred pounds had turned her head—everybody but her grandfather, Joe, and he always believed there was a man in it.

But silent as the grave they kept, because Arthur willed it so. He told her all about himself, and laid his secrets bare under oath she'd never whisper 'em. And then it came out his family was in Canada—a very prosperous race—and his mother was always writing to him to come and join 'em. One letter he showed Nelly, in which his mother prayed him to come to Ontario and said 'twas the joy of her life to know he'd found a woman worthy of him. She took it all in, of course, and when at last they was tokened he asked her if she'd flee her home with him and begin a new life in a new world and be married among his people; and she said nothing would please her better than so to do.

"We'll vanish out of Ponsworthy," he said; "and 'twill be a nine days' wonder and not one of your folk will guess the amazing thing you've done till they get a piece of our wedding-cake from Ontario."

There's no doubt that now and then Nelly did ax herself why for there should be such a lot of mystery, and what good reason could exist for hiding up their engagement so cruel careful from every living soul. Indeed,

she even axed him, for, naturally enough, she wanted to taste her triumph and proclaim how she'd took a man that never lifted his eyes to a female afore he'd met her. And, as he also explained, money was nought to him and he'd have dollops of it when his father died, she was in a position to say he'd took her for herself and not the five hundred pounds—which Nelly would have loved to make known. But he assured her there was good reasons for silence, and that he had enemies, and that it might cause him a lot of discomfort among certain people if the murder came out; so, love-blinded as she was, she didn't doubt him, and denied herself the triumph she'd fairly earned. He'd got her, body and soul, by now, and if he'd told her to go in the river and drown herself, she'd have doubtless done his bidding.

II.

They went their hidden way, and a time came when all preparations were made for Canada. Nelly had transferred her money to a bank out there, and he'd done the same, so he said, and only kept enough to book their passages by a ship what sailed from Plymouth. They meant to hide their plans and make a bolt at the last, for Arthur was very determined that none should know the truth till they heard it from the Dominion. He wouldn't even let Nelly tell her grandfather, who was the only person she much cared about.

"'Twon't hurt the old blid to wait a week or two," he told her. "His mind moves terrible slow, and afore he's properly grasped the fact you've gone, he'll get your letter telling him you're married to me. And be it as it will, I shall disappear when you do, and the people will put two and two together and know what's happened well enough."

They were standing in the dimpsey light of a late March evening a hundred yards from Nelly's home in an ivy-clad lane at the time, and Ball was a bit troubled because, as he explained to her, his master appeared to scent something in the wind and had put a few searching questions to him.

"Why the old devil's got suspicions I don't know,"

he said, "but he has. You and me were seen together a week ago, it seems, and I think Jarvis Toms has been talking along with your grandfather since. If Toms knew, the fat would be in the fire for several reasons, and therefore, after to-night we'd best not to meet till we meet for good and all. 'Tis only a matter of weeks now, and meantime——"

He stopped because a little thing had happened. He was idly hitting the hedge with his stick as he spoke, and now, from a yard or two away, a small bird popped out of the ivy curtain that trailed over the bank, and went to a twig near by and sat chattering her danger signal. 'Twas a wren, and the sight of it made Arthur switch off.

"I was going to say, we must find a private post-office, so as you shall know the latest and have final plans," he said. "I'll fix the date so soon as I know it, and we've got to get away from here before sun up, either on the day the ship sails, or else the day before. We might go after nightfall, when the people are to bed, or we might start so as to catch the first train from Ashburton on the morning of the sailing. But we must have a place out of sight for letters as we don't meet again, and this may do very well if I'm right."

With that he hunted in the ivy, and there, sure enough, was wrenny's nest—a snug little place thatched all round and hid very clever beyond sight of any eye.

Arthur laughed quietly; he didn't laugh often, and when he did he made no sound. Then he took out the unlucky bird's eight little eggs and threw 'em in the road.

"She won't come back no more now," he said, setting his foot on the eggs, "and we'll have her nest for our letters. Nought would serve better. Make a careful note of the place, Nelly, and look for a line from me Monday or Tuesday next."

She felt sad, even in that great moment, for the poor bird, because she had a heart, which be a common gift with the fools of this world; but she done as he told her, marked the nest so careful that she'd be able to find it in the dark, and soon after left him, with his kisses on her cheek.

"The day and hour of meeting is what you'll find Monday or Tuesday," he said; "and after that us'll be together for

evermore. Meantime, don't you look at me if you see me ; and if your grandfather, or anybody, names my name to you, tell 'em you know nothing about me, and don't want to. Your cleverness will rise to that without a doubt."

So 'twas left, and a day later, for a surprise for Arthur when he came to the nest, Nelly wrote him a love-letter which he should find when he brought his own. And so it was, for when, on Monday night after dark, she went and put her hand in the little downy place, her letter was gone and there was one waiting from Master Arthur.

He didn't waste words neither, for this is what he wrote :

" Passages booked. We sail from Plymouth on Friday afternoon. Be at Hunter's Cross about four-thirty Friday morning. We catch morning train and have got to tramp to Totnes. Won't risk going to Ashburton.—A.B."

So now she knowed her duty, and joyfully planned to perform it. Hunter's Cross stood on Holne Moor, about three mile off, and it was an ancient monument of rugged granite five foot tall, with arms a bit longer than most of the moorland crosses. A lone spot it guards—a place out of the eye of man, rising up above the wilderness with nought but rabbit holes and fuzz bushes round about it.

" God send 'tis a fine day," thought Nelly, for she knowed that from there down to the railway at Totnes was a matter of eight or nine miles.

Time dragged for her, then, but it didn't stand still, and when the great morn came, a bit afore four o'clock, clad in her best, and carrying a little hold-all with what small treasures she valued most, she slipped out of her old home into starry darkness, wondered if she'd meet Arthur by the way, and started for Hunter's Cross. 'Twas a bitter cold morning, but clear and promising fine weather, so she stepped out with a high heart, got down to the river, crossed it, and set her face to breast the great climb t'other side. She missed her way once in the woods, however, and lost ten minutes, so that, when she came out on the moor she'd got best part of a mile to go farther than she ought. So she hastened, and her breath made a steam on the air, and presently she was straining her eyes for the cross and

hoping to see it heave up against the whitening east. For morn was in the sky by now, and the rime on the heath flashed up from the darkness under her feet.

And then she had the shock of her life, and vowed ever afterwards that she felt the hand of age upon her from that moment. For two men was alongside Hunter's Cross, her old grandfather and Arthur Ball; and one was a figure of fun, as he always was, and other was the awfullest tragical sight as ever Nelly saw, or any other woman.

Old Joe Bamsey, in his great coat and billycock hat, with a red worsted muffler round his ears and red mittens on his hands, was sitting smoking his pipe on a gert stone, and Arthur Ball was tied hand and foot to the cross, bound with ropes, and his arms outstretched against the granite, for all the world as if he was crucified! There he stood, glaring up into the dawn, so white as a dog's tooth, and if his eyes could have killed old Joe and Nelly both, deaders they'd have been. But he was beyond power of evil for the minute, for the ropes was round him like serpents and he couldn't move a finger.

Joe got up to meet his granddaughter, but by the time he reached her she'd gone fainty, and very near fell into his arms.

"Keep your senses to thank God, Nelly, my dear," says the old man. "Pitch 'pon thicky stone, if you please, and then listen to me. A very great escape you've had, for the powers of evil, in the shape of this anointed young scamp, very near got you in their clutches," he said; "but thanks to me and a good friend or two, and the watching Lord above us, you'm saved alive. And now I'll tell you the particklers, and Arthur Ball can list to 'em, too, for 'twill show him, clever as he is, that he ban't so clever as his Maker. The little things of the world confound the great ones," says old Joe, "and so it is. For three days agone it come to my ears that you was off with this here man; and that didn't astonish me overmuch; but doubting if all was right, and mistrusting such a lot of hookem-snivery mystery, I went to Jarvis Toms, this man's master, about him, to see if he knowed ought of what you two have planned. And, first, I'll tell you how the thing come to my ears, because it will teach you more about the ways of God

with man than you've yet larned, seemingly. Your half-sister, Jane, you must know, found a wren's nest down the lane a few weeks ago and to the delight of her life and her most precious treasure. But one day the child come to see how it went with the eggs wrenny had laid, and found the nest empty. Then, casting about, she see'd the ruin on the ground, and knew somebody had stole the eggs and broke 'em. She raged, as a child will, and cried herself to sleep that night. And next day she went there again, to see if by any hap the bird had come back to lay again. She didn't find no eggs but she found a letter signed 'A.B.,' and very wisely brought it to me and no other. Well, I ban't ashamed to confess in this company that I read it, and having done so, told Jane to take it back lightning-quick. Which she did do. That's how the clever man's cleverness be brought to nought, you see, and turned into laughter—for cleverness be a two-edged sword, Nelly, and so often as not cuts the hand that uses it.

"I went to Jarvis Toms then, but said nothing—only asked him all he knew concerning this here crucified rogue. And Toms, as thought the world of the base creature, told me how Ball come to him at a loose end, and in a weak moment, finding how Toms hated the females, confessed he'd run away from his wife. 'And who shall blame him?' asked Jarvis Toms. ''Tis his secret, mind, and don't you tell it again. He's a very valuable man, and his wife is his business, not mine; and if he wants to live away from her, he's only wanting what fifty husbands out of fifty-one wants in my experience.' So spake Toms from his narrow point of view about women; and then I told him what I knew was going to happen, and that in three days his hero and my granddaughter meant to take ship from Plymouth for Lord knows where."

Old Joe stopped to light his pipe, and Nelly, who had got her wits together by now, spoke.

"To Canada we was going, and his mother expected us, for I saw her letter."

"I don't know nothing about Canada," answered Mr. Bamsey, "and he's quite equal to forging a letter from his mother for your eyes; but this I know, Canada or no Canada, he's a married man with a deserted wife, and

that's enough to go on with. And when Mr. Toms heard the dreadful news, his view of yonder chap changed instanter, and 'twas his righteous thought that when Ball arrived to Hunter's Cross, he should find a pretty good rally of neighbours to meet him. And I agreed. So six strong men was here, hid in the gorse bushes, to welcome this malefactor. Johnny Chaffe was one, and Ted Prowse and his brother, and my friend, Ned Cleave, as handled the rope very clever, and Sam Withycombe and Timothy Pratt. And me to lead and command. They be all gone down to Holne to breakfast; and presently they'll come back and let him loose when you and me have started home along."

Nelly looked at Ball and the man looked at her; but he was dumb. As grandfather Bamsey said after, 'twas a very dramatical moment. Then Nelly took her hold-all and went down the hill to Holne, where her grandfather had got a trap waiting; and after they'd let Arthur cool his heels for an hour or two, the heroes from Ponsworthy went up over again and set him loose. Never a word he said, but picked up his bag and crawled away, and none in these parts ever heard or seed him again. Doubtless he sailed in the ship, but what his real name was, and where he'd really came from, will never be known this side of Doom.

Nelly got her money back, however; and such is the power of that ancient man, her grandfather, that there's good reason to believe Ned Cleave will have her yet. For he forgave her when the ugly truth was known, and he done a lot to cheer her sad spirit after this dreadful adventure.

She's a changed woman, without a doubt, and she never went back to her stepmother, because she couldn't suffer the sight of her half-sister, Jane, no more. But, as old Joe pointed out, 'twas Jane who saved her from the wrath to come; and he also told her that her hate of a wren, as growed up in her from that day, was very ungrateful to God Almighty, who sent the least of His fowls of the air to rescue Nelly after she'd put herself beyond human salvation.

"PERCY"

" PERCY "

Of Widow Mercy White I always thought that, compared with the other women in Daleham, she was a half-sovereign along with a lot of halfpence. Never did I know such a proper angel in human form ; and by that I don't mean her outside, for after all our body be but a shell of no great account ; but her mind and her lofty views touching man's duty to his neighbour, and woman's duty to her neighbour, and the true and only road by which we may hope for salvation. There weren't nobody to touch the widow in these high matters, and Parson Tozer himself was proud of her, and no doubt her Maker was prouder still. But, though her soul was a very fine thing and shone out of her eyes, the eyes themselves weren't hung straight in her head, and they were large and fishy, and of a dirty mud colour, and no charm to 'em whatever. In fact, Widow White at fifty-five was a terrible ugly piece, merely viewed as a woman, and when people saw her daughter Milly, all they thought was what an amazingly handsome man her father must have been to master the mother in her. For while Milly weren't none of the picture-book girls—with blue eyes and golden hair and little red mouths so small you'd think they had to suck in their food through a straw —though she wasn't like that ; yet she might be called a wonder of beauty compared with her mother. She was a big woman to begin with, whereas Mrs. White were one of they precious things done up in a small packet ; and Milly had pretty slate-grey eyes and wonnerful black eyebrows over them. She was slim and active, and not exactly hopeful about things, along perhaps of living so much on the threshold of the next world with her mother. For the elder woman's heart and mind was so set upon the untold glories she was heading for, that life in general, and life at

Daleham in particular, seemed but a passing shadow and of no account whatever to her.

Of course it's all right if you've had your bit of fun and be past anything much but pap, and spend three parts of your time in bed, or asleep in the sun—it's all right, then, to bank on a good hereafter ; but I always will say that the old didn't ought to make the young throw up the sponge before their time, nor yet turn away their thoughts from this world and the pleasures and duties that belong to it. Because, though we all know the next world can give this one a long start and a beating every time—that is suppose we go to the right place—yet, if you're in your twenties still, you've got to face a tidy few years here in all likelihood afore you fly up along, and 'tis here, whether or no, that you must earn the right to go aloft at all. And there's giving in marriage in this world, and there's the ocean, and there's a good few other fine things that we may or may not miss up over ; but which we know, from the Word itself, won't be there. In fact, this life is quite worth while if you are young and healthy and reasonably hopeful and getting good wages for good work.

So, while I gave good heed to Widow White, and heard her gladly on the subject of Heaven and how to get there, yet I found my present life very nice and interesting to go on with, and I didn't want marriage done away with yet, nor the sea neither, for the very good reason that I was in love with MillyWhite and wished to wed her,and also because I made my living as a fisherman on a trawler. The *Provider* was my boat, and no better ever sailed out of Daleham, and no more God-fearing man than Amos Friend, my skipper, ever made his crew sign the pledge ; but Friend had a fine wife and five nice-spoken children, and he loved the sea next to his Maker, and if he had a sorrow, it was the thought that there'd be no British Channel for him, and no tanned-sailed fisher boat to sail in, after he went home to his reward.

And when I asked Friend, who was a second father to me—my parents being dead—whether I might, without doing wrong, think upon a wife," he said :

" Of course, Jack Spicer. Why for not ? You'm an honest, clean, church-going member. You ain't got no

vices. You live in charity with your neighbours and are so tough as a nut. You'll be a skipper yourself some day. So it's my opinion that you've every right to take a wife, and I know your savings stand for it. Our job ain't what it used to be," went on Amos Friend, " because the steam trawlers have it all their own way, and the Daleham Fleet will soon have to take to steam, or else motor engines, if it ain't going to die out ; but that's in the Lord's Hand, and meanwhile you can count upon a good living for your life ; and when you have sons to think upon, you'll do well to apprentice them to land jobs, same as I have done."

Well, that was running on too far in my opinion, seeing as I hadn't so much as offered for Miss White just yet ; but with Friend's advice to work upon, and a great and flaming love for Milly that properly shook me to my marrow when I thought upon it, I felt that I was now well in my right to tell her how I felt and unfold my feelings in her ear. A good few already had done so to my certain knowledge ; but, so far as the world knew, she was heart-whole yet. And seeing that her mother weren't never very enthusiastic about the married state, having had no luck with her own husband, as fell out of *The Morning Star* one rough night when three sheets in the wind and got drownded. I didn't much expect to have no great applause from her. But I felt pretty sure that she'd not forbid Milly, if by good chance the maiden found herself inclined to marry me, and so I began courting in a steadfast and prayerful frame of mind.

It weren't all beer and skittles neither, for Milly by no means felt to me what I felt to her—not at first. She liked me neither better nor worse than she liked two more that was offering for her; and not until Arthur Meadows got tired of waiting and took another girl—a friend of Milly's—did she begin to see the male ain't made of patience, and have a right to expect " yes " or " no " for answer. In fact, the women that keep men hanging on hooks in their larders make me properly wild, and they don't deserve to be married at all in my opinion ; and they often do get left in the long run for that matter.

With Milly still unable to decide I put it to her mother, and found to my satisfaction that she was in my favour.

"If she's going to be married at all," said Widow Mercy White, "then I'd liefer she took you than any other man I know in these parts. You come of good havage, Jack Spicer, and your uncle was a saint, even if your father was not; and your poor mother and me was close friends for many years. We had a good bit in common, and both loved the dumb animals that haven't got no souls; and though your mother cared nothing for the creatures after she married, and gave up her rabbits and pigeons and that, I, as you know, always like to have a few such things about me, for they teach us to be thankful to God that He made us men and women and not guinea-pigs, out of His great love and mercy; for if He weren't a God of love, He might just as well have made even such a woman as me a mere jackdaw or a coney, with nothing but death to look forward to."

I brought her back to the matter in hand, because she was always very apt, once she began to talk, to wander away to higher things, them being her speciality.

"Then I've got you behind me, ma'am," I said, "and I do think Milly's very addicted to me a'ready, and I'll venture to bet a sole to a smelt that, when she hears you be favourable, she'll take the plunge."

"I should be very sorry to influence her," answered Mercy White, "and I'm not one of those, by a mighty long way, that think marriage is a cure for all ills. But if I've known it fail too often, I've also seen it succeed, and I'm not saying that I wouldn't like to have Milly in her own home where I hope she'll shine a thought brighter than she do in mine. She's a good daughter, Jack, and a good girl; but she's got points that fidget me, though I dare say they'll be nothing to a man that loves her. She's untidy and cat-handed and careless, and leaves things about, and would have my house terrible unshipshape if I wasn't always after her. A good one for work I grant, and never frightened of hard labour; but—well, she haven't got such a high standard of smartness and everything 'just so' as what I have; and if the truth must be told, she's inclined to put comfort before cleanliness. And that's a danger you'll have to guard against, if she takes you."

Well, that was a danger I welcomed very kindly, though of course I didn't say so. But I knew a good few married

fishermen, and I also knew that comfort was the first thing they looked for and demanded in their homes ; and where the wife put other things before it, and martyred the tired man with rules and regulations the moment he put his foot over the threshold, then it weren't all as easy and pleasant as you would wish. And if a house be going to take the first place and not the man that's called to live in it, then, very like, you'll find the shoe pinches either man or woman, or both.

Milly, on hearing me offer for her for the tenth time of asking, felt she couldn't hope for much more liberty and so took me, though without any great show of excitement. But I knew her for the soul of truth, and I felt certain she wouldn't change and go back upon me, her word once given. And more she did. In fact, after she had got used to the thought of me being her husband for life, it woke her up to quite a nice interest in me, and she set to work on a lot of my points I'd never have considered but for her. She made me cut my beard off first, and, after a month of doubt, decided I mustn't grow it no more, though I always hold a good beard is a source of strength to a deep-sea fisherman. However, she didn't like the colour and it had to go ; and a good few other outside trifles she altered. My land clothes she cast away as if they was dirt, and I dressed to please her ashore. My mates, when they saw me of a Sunday, said I looked like a counter-jumper out for a holiday ; and Widow White herself, first time I drank tea with her after Milly and me was tokened, looked doubtfully at a yellow silk tie Milly had given me, and the lavender summer suiting, with a puce line, that she had chose for my new clothes, and the dormouse-coloured bowler hat she'd found in a shop t'other side of Daleham Bay.

" You're going it," said Mrs. White. " But I'm not sure if I didn't like you better in your serge and your reefer jacket and black, soft hat."

" I'm not sure either," I said. " But nowadays, ma'am, it ain't so much what you like, or what I like, or what anybody else likes. The only thing that have got to be thought upon seemingly is what Milly likes, and she chose this rig-out for Sundays, and but for my making a favour of

it, things might be gayer still, for she's got a terrible lively taste in colours, as you know."

Then, I remember, we drank our tea, and visited Mrs. White's Angora rabbits and petted her great, marmalade-coloured cat, known as "Corban," because he was a gift. And then we went up together—Milly and me—on Daleham Head, to talk love; and Michael Armstrong's two rude young boys sauced my new hat.

All went well with our courting, and there's no doubt Milly was loving me very dear indeed, and quite pleased when I axed her to name the day. And then came the overturn of civilisation, and just after my girl had said it should be round about next Michaelmas, the Germans named the day also and got in first, and we were up against the devilish horror of the greatest war ever known upon earth. For a long time I couldn't realise the thing. It would come back and back upon me, same as a death in the family do, and between times I'd forget it and go on love-making just as usual. But then it soon got rubbed into every mother's son that they'd be wanted pretty smart; indeed, a good few of us, who belonged to the Royal Naval Reserve, were called almost so soon as the War started. And when I went on that run to Antwerp, Milly shed tears enough to float a battleship, and when I came back, unharmed but cruel tired, she clamoured for me to marry her before worse things happened. I was willing, but her mother was not. Mercy White, in fact, took a very strong line indeed, and dared us to think of any such thing for an instant until the War was over and done with. She didn't mince words neither.

"You've got to go and help to beat the forces of Satan same as every other honest young man," she said. "And nobody can pretend England will come out of this terrible affair without losing a lot of soldiers and sailors. And whether you are one of them is God's secret, Jack Spicer. But I don't want for Milly to be a widow on my hands in six months or less, and I'm sure you don't. So the engagement can go on, same as before, but I beg you'll wait to wed till you can face the future for her and yourself with a tolerable degree of certainty. And that's your Maker's will without a doubt; and how far He be going to let

Germany ruin the world we shall see when the time comes."

I agreed. I was fearful disappointed about it, and so was Milly, but both felt it would be no use going across her mother, who had a useful little bit of money and owned her house also. Therefore we parted once more, and the War drew me in and swallowed me alive. I got on a hospital ship first, and then was drafted South, and, at last, brought up on a mine-sweeper in the Mediterranean. And beastly work it was.

Then happened the adventure without which there wouldn't have been anything out of the common to mention concerning me and Milly and her mother.

At Alexandria it was, and hearing suddenly, after two years of war, that it had come round my turn to get home for a breather, I rejoiced greatly and let my mind dwell on Daleham and Milly. We'd wrote to each other very regular, and she was out of her mind with delight to hear I'd got leave at last and could count upon ten days at home.

And of course I had to fetch along some fine presents for her and something for her mother also. And it was the something for her mother that took me all my time to find, because, banking her all on the next world, as she done, it was a difficult puzzle to know what I could fetch along to give her a bit of new pleasure in this. Then, having bought some brave skeins of silk, so bright as rainbows, for my girl, and a great brass ewer and basin, that only wanted polishing to make a very fine appearance in our home, when we got it. I was tramping the Alexandria bazaar and wondering what the mischief to buy for Widow Mercy White, when I came across a shop of all sorts and, among other things, they kept a lot of live creatures in cages. There was a terrier pup which an old Arab, who kept the show, swore was true Maltese, and worth a Jew's eye. But I knew about they true Maltese terriers only too well, because a friend of mine once bought a pup in Malta for an English sovereign and fetched it home in triumph; and instead of biding small enough to put in your pocket, as a full-grown Maltese terrier did ought to bide, the creature grew and grew till it got to be the most hideous pantomime of a dog ever seen. A fearful object—very near

a yard long and not above nine inches high—with a coat like a sheep ; and yet such was the large-hearted nature of the beast that my friend kept him alive, and to the end of his days he was thought well upon for his good character and gentlemanly manners.

So I didn't buy the dog, nor yet a mongoose, with red eyes, that I felt would give Mercy White no great pleasure ; and then, knowing her affection for all feathered things, I was torn in two between a pair of green and yellow parrakeets and a green and purple parrot, with a dash of red about him—a comely bird as looked at me in a way to say he was very wishful for me to buy him. Feeling a good bit divided between the creatures, I asked as to the price and found the parrot was to be a sovereign of English money, cage included, and the parrakeets thirty bob. But the old Arab seemed more disposed to part with the parrot than t'others, and seeing me in doubt he bated his price, and said I might have the single bird for fifteen shilling.

" Do he talk ? " I said, and the brown man answered that he did not. But he was wrong, for the words had hardly left his lying mouth when the bird spoke.

" Polly, put the kettle on ! " he said ; and such cleverness decided me, because a cheerful parrot like that was bound to please Mrs. White and brighten up her home a good bit.

Fifteen shilling for such a smart bird seemed pretty cheap in an Eastern bazaar and I was just going to fork out the cash when, to my astonishment, the owner came down again.

" I give him away," he said. " I give this fine parrot to you for twelve shilling ! "

My own impression is that, if I'd bargained a bit, that blessed Arab would soon have been on his knees to me to take his parrot for nothing ; but I closed there and then, and paid his twelve bob and went back to the ship with my bird. And everybody said I'd got a masterpiece for the money and wondered a lot why the price was so low. For it turned out to be a parrot of very fine behaviour, friendly to all and so gentle that a stranger might scratch his head without fear of a nip. Going home I often had him out of his cage, and he'd poke about among us for a nut or a bit of banana, or a crumb of sugar, and say, " Polly, put the kettle

on " in a funny, old man's voice, so human as your own grandfather's. Sometimes he would speak a word or two in a language we didn't understand, though no doubt 'twas Arabic, picked up from the Alexandria bazaar, and he'd whistle now and again when in the mood and imitate the street cries of Alexandria. Altogether a proper catch of a bird, and I might have sold him for a five-pound note more'n once if I'd been minded to. But " No," I said, " I've bought this here fine fowl for my mother-in-law to be, and she's going to have it."

We got home safe after a scrap with a German sea-louse in the Bay of Biscay, and six hours after landing at Plymouth I was into Daleham once again and everybody terrible pleased to see me.

Milly properly wept for joy, I do assure you, and when I trotted out the silk and the great jug and basin of brass, she delighted in 'em, and soon had the metal so as you could see it shining like a flame on the darkest day. And Mrs. Mercy White, though she held in about it at first, and was in two minds whether she did ought to open her heart to a worldly thing like a parrot, couldn't resist the bird when she found what a high-class character he was and what a temper he'd got.

In fact, as Milly told me, behind the scenes, her mother found herself very greatly moved by the gift, and thought it a kind thing for me to do ; because women like her don't often get remembered by the younger generation, and less than ever nowadays.

My leave didn't amount to much when the voyage was taken out of it, and cruel soon I had to say " good-bye " to Milly and be off to my duty once again. And it wasn't till I got out in the Mediterranean once more, that touching at Malta, we received a home mail and I found a letter from my sweetheart that properly changed the face of the world for me and put me in such a tantara that, for a bit, I didn't want to live another hour and didn't care a rope's end who won the War, or anything.

I can't do no better than give you the letter same as Milly wrote it, for no words of mine would improve upon hers. And there were tear-marks I may tell you—proper splashes on page four. A most tragical letter, in fact, as

you will see for yourself, and the longest ever she wrote, or will ever write again, I reckon.

"Lavender Cottage,
"Daleham.

"My dear Jack,

"I hope this finds you better than it leaves me at present, for I'm all over the place and in a proper dreadful state and wish I'd died afore any such cruel thing had happened as have happened. And whether 'tis your fault I can't say till I hear from you, but I've sworn to my mother that you're an innocent man, and though she never will believe it to her dying day, I always shall do so until I hear to the contrary.

"It's all off between us, Jack, unless you can save me; for I was never built to go contrary to my mother and I never shall; and she's said, in the hearing of a score of neighbours, that she'd rather see me in my coffin than married to you—so there it is—a fearful come-along-of-it without a doubt. But you'll be wanting to know how these horrors have happened, and what you've done to cast us down so fearful. It was Sunday, and mother had got a bit of a tissick in her tubes, so she stopped home and didn't go to church. Of a Sunday, as you know, we sit in the parlour, and I'd lit the fire and settled mother beside it with her Sunday books; and she'd got 'Percy' in there for company, because she'd grown that proud and fond of him you wouldn't believe, and dearly loved to let him walk up to her shoulder and show him off to callers. And when I say 'Percy,' I mean the parrot what you brought her; for soon after you was gone back to the War, mother said that the bird did ought to have a name, and three days afterwards she suddenly ordained that he was to be called 'Percy.' Why for I couldn't tell you. I asked her; but she said she had her reasons, which weren't no odds to me, and that 'Percy' was a very good name, in her opinion, for him.

"He behaved so nice as ever and often said out his little speech and also spoke sometimes in a foreign language; and mother expected he was saying 'Polly, put the kettle on,' in Turkish perhaps. But all went well, and I'd left 'em together and gone off to church, to say a prayer for

you and hope the Germans would miss you and the War would soon be won. Then I returned home in a nice enough frame of mind, and found what was pretty well the end of the world for me, in a manner of speaking. There was mother, so red as a beetroot, blowing out her breath like a grampus and trapsing up and down the parlour, and ' Percy ' nowhere to be seen !

" ' My goodness, mother ! ' I said, ' what the mischief have overtook you ? You've got an inflammation, I'm afraid. Better I run for Doctor Forbes. And where's " Percy " ? '

" ' I've had the shock of a lifetime,' said mother, sinking into her arm-chair while I mended the fire. ' A very fearful thing has happened in this house—Sunday and all,' said mother, ' and it's a far-reaching thing, Milly—a proper horror, though God's work, and He's moved in time, as He always do, and saved your soul alive.'

" I was so amazed that I stared upon mother and my mind refused to work. I just answered like a machine, and all I could say was what I'd said afore.

" ' Where's " Percy " ? ' I asked again.

" ' Never mind the bird. He's the Lord's tool no doubt, to free you from your bargain to marry John Spicer,' said mother, ' and that he has done, and I want you to grasp home, this instant moment, that your engagement's broken off, and that you never marry that forgotten man—never, never, so long as I'm above ground to prevent it ! '

" But I may tell you, all the same, dear Jack, that though I shall never marry you, unless you can put this right, which you can't, I expect, that I shall always love you. What's more, I won't marry no other man, but die a maid if I live to be four score.

" ' What on earth have Jack done ? ' I asked mother, and felt myself going fainty, you may be sure. I thought at least you must have gone over to the enemy ; but she soon explained.

" ' He've done this,' she said. ' He've played a sinful and devilish trick on this house, and knowing me for a Christian woman, godlier than most, he's planted upon me a heathen bird full of hateful knowledge.'

" ' Not " Percy " ? ' I cried.

" ' Don't you call him " Percy " no more,' she answered. ' That's no name for this foul creature ! You listen to what has happened, and then you'll see light. I was reading the Morning Prayer alongside the fire, and he was in his cage beside the window, and I'd oped the window a few inches, because the fire smoked, the wind being in the south-west, which always makes it do so. And a wicked fisherman went by with another like himself, and one spoke an evil word, and t'other laughed and they passed on, killing time till the public houses opened. I said, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and went forward with my reading, and then suddenly, without a moment's warning or preparation, like the trump of Doom, that green wretch broke out. I ban't going to soil your ears with what he said, but never since I came into Daleham, or into the world for that matter, have I heard such a stream and shower of language. I didn't know there was such words in the English tongue. For it was English, and I couldn't pretend for an instant I didn't understand the meaning. Not on a Saturday night after closing have ever I heard a half, or a quarter, of what that bird said, and I felt as if a devil from the pit had got in my parlour and sat there blistering my ears and freezing my heart with his abominations. And I'm very sure now that what we thought was " Polly, put the kettle on " in Turkish, ain't nothing of the kind. 'Tis the worst crooked words to be heard in the East, I expect, though the meaning be mercifully hid.'

" She gasped and coughed, and I looked at her and felt stricken to the core myself, and turned goose-flesh down my spine with horror. For a moment I thought that mother had probably rose up in her wrath and wrung ' Percy's ' neck for him.

" ' And what did you do about it, my old dear ? ' I asked her, giving her a lozenge for her throat.

" ' I dashed upon him and tried to shut his wicked mouth,' she said. ' But once started he was evidently enjoying it, and he kept on over and over ; so I took him out into the coal-shed and shut the door on him. I'll get the greengrocer to kill him to-morrow. And now you understand, Milly, why your engagement to John Spicer be done for.'

" ' No, I don't,' I said. ' Because a bird have broke out like this—— '

" ' He knew it,' cried mother. ' Don't you tell me he didn't know it. The War's ruined the young men of this generation, and him along with the rest. He heard that parrot swearing, in some far-off foreign port, and he bought it and forgot his manhood and honour and his bringing up and everything, and planted it on me—ME—for what he'd call a bit of fun. And anybody as could do that, knowing Mercy White, deserves the bolt of Heaven to fall upon him. And never more will I hear his name on your lips, Milly ; and if you dare to say a good word for the man after this, you must look to yourself, for I won't be a mother to you no more.'

" I was a long sight too dazed to answer back ; besides, I had the sense to see that mother couldn't be argued with just then. So I kept my mouth shut and hoped things weren't so bad as they looked, and went and got the dinner.

" 'Twas a dreadful day, and I felt very thankful when mother's tubes gave out altogether and she couldn't speak no more. She went to bed early, and, as her room faced t'other way, I sneaked down to ' Percy ' presently and gave him a slice of apple and a walnut. But I dursn't take him in the house, of course, for fear he might let go again. The bird was a good bit put about, because he hadn't got no use for the coal-shed ; but he didn't say a word to make a baby blush while I was with him, and next morning, having thought about it all night, I prayed mother for his life. I'd got my ideas together by then, and first I axed her to give ' Percy ' another chance, which she utterly refused to do ; and then I begged her to let him live till you'd had time to answer this here letter breaking off our engagement. ' Because,' I said, ' 'tis only fair and Christian to hear both sides, mother.' But she answered that there was no two sides to wickedness, and, in any case, the match was off, and as for ' Percy,' he was a lot better under ground than on it.

" ' They birds,' she said, ' live for two hundred years, and I ban't going to let him utter his hideous curses in Daleham for that space of time, nor yet another day for

that matter.' She was far ways from her true nature still, and talked as though the poor, unconscious creature was in league with Satan himself, instead of being the victim of wicked sailor-men, long since dead for all we know.

"'Then I had another thought to save 'Percy,' but I didn't tell mother for the minute, for fear she'd turn it down also; and when she sent me out for Mr. Potter, the greengrocer, to come round and put the poor dear away, I nipped up to the Reverend Tozer, who thinks the world of mother, and she thinks the world of him. He saw me at once, and I begged him to come and talk to mother and give her the benefit of his wisdom and understanding on a terrible sad subject. I then explained exactly what had happened and cried buckets, and he was most comforting, and so was Mrs. Tozer. The reverend gentleman said he'd be round in half an hour, and meantime told me I needn't obey mother and go for Mr. Potter, till he'd seen her and had speech with her. 'Twas a ray of hope, Jack, and I hung about, not daring to face mother, till I marked his reverence come along. Then I ran back, only just in time to open the door to him; and mother, who always thawed before the holy man, heard how I'd been to call him first thing after breakfast, and how well pleased he was to come.

"'"A third opinion is often well worth while, Mrs. White,' he said, 'and I think it was very nice of Milly to come and see me about this tragedy. And now, if you'll tell me exactly what happened from the first, I shall gladly give you the benefit of my opinion. Let me have every detail. I ask, because you know what I feel for you and Milly, and my great respect for Jack Spicer. I prepared him for confirmation, and I have lived to see him grow up a good and God-fearing young fellow, and a brave fighter for his country.'

"'"About him my mind is made up for evermore, your reverence,' said mother firmly, 'and I'll show no shadow of changing. He's done a awful, wicked thing, and whatever he was before the War, it's clear the War have ruined him, like it have a good few others. But so far as the other points are concerned I'm very willing to tell the hateful tale.'

"And she told it, sparing his reverence nothing but 'Percy's' language.

"'"What he actually said I'd rather have my tongue struck

by lightning than tell,' finished mother ; ' but there it is—now you know all, Reverend Mr. Tozer ; and you've got to remember that he may burst out all over again at any moment. He enjoyed every word of it—God forgive him.'

" The clergyman considered a bit and then began to make excuses for ' Percy.'

" ' Let me look at the bird,' he said, and I fetched him, and mother flushed at the very sight of him, and had her Shetland shawl ready to smother the cage instanter if he opened his mouth in the presence of a minister. But ' Percy ' had got his tail down a good bit after the night in the coal-shed, and he weren't saying anything whatever. He had a sort of sulky look, I thought. In fact, you might say he properly scowled at mother, and mother scowled back at him.

" Then Mr. Tozer cleared his throat and gave us a little lecture on parrots and men, and bad language in general ; and he said there was a base and godless order of seafaring fellows in the world who often taught parrots to cuss and monkeys to drink, and so on. And he said that it weren't nothing to do with the War, but just poor, faulty human nature labouring under the effects of bad education and a wrong sense of humour. And he also said that you weren't that sort at all, and he was positive certain that you never used foul language yourself, nor yet learnt bird or beast to do so.

" ' I don't say that John Spicer taught it these hideous words, but I do say he knew what it had got up its sleeve,' explained mother ; ' and if he did, then the crime was his, to give it to a woman like me, well knowing my famous love of animals—dumb or otherwise."

" Then the Reverend Tozer answered her, and he scratched ' Percy's ' head thoughtfully as he spoke, and cheered him a bit, for as you know he's a very affectionate creature—' Percy,' I mean—and he hadn't heard a kind word for four and twenty hours by now.

" ' What probably happened is this,' said the gentleman. ' Your parrot, Mrs. White, has no doubt in his time seen a good deal of the seamy side of life. If Jack bought him at Alexandria, we may assume that he has met many a rough-tongued man, and, very likely, been to sea in the Merchant

Marine, and heard much that it would have been better he had not. With his marvellous gift of imitation, the parrot has chronicled these evil phrases in his unconscious mind, and the oftener he has heard them, the deeper he has fixed them. And now, just when they were doubtless growing dim, as bad luck would have it, two fishermen passed your window and one swore in the parrot's hearing as well as your own. What follows? The floodgates of memory are unloosed in "Percy's" little brain. One word leads to another, and, before you can look round, he is pouring out the familiar expletives of the Merchant Marine. In a word, the creature had a relapse, as any human being might have had—with this difference, that his fall, so to call it, was purely mechanical and perfectly blameless. You must not, therefore, visit the sins of unknown sailormen upon the parrot, Mrs. White; and, if I may say so, you must not visit the mysterious memory of the parrot on your future son-in-law; because you might just as well blame a gramophone for repeating any horrible remark that might be spoken into it.'

"Wasn't it clever of his reverence to put it like that, Jack? But mother, though she began to yield about 'Percy,' hadn't given in a mite about you. She would have it that you knew he was a swearer, and did this for wickedness woke in you by the War; but she agreed with Mr. Tozer so far about the parrot and the holy man have took 'Percy' himself—to keep him under his eye for a bit. If he hears nothing shameful, then all may yet be well so far as the bird's concerned; but if he begins again, then parson's going to take steps about it—what exactly he haven't yet told us. One thing I'm sure of: he won't do in 'Percy' if he can help it.

"So that's how we stand, and I wish to God you could come home and set about mother, though of course you can't, and if you did I doubt if she'd let you come through the door. And I be going thin as a thread, and shall be in a declinement very likely afore you come back. So no more at present, from your affectionate lover,

"MILLY.

"Don't you think I'm giving mother any peace, because I'm not, but 'tis all in vain."

Well, that was the letter, and if any seaman got a beastlier one out of that home mail, I don't know which it was. You see this fatal affair meant such a lot. It meant, in fact, pretty much what it said, for I knew that Mercy White never went from her word once given, and I knew that she was so obstinate as a rock where the next world came into a problem. Of course, if she was firmly convinced that I had heard what 'Percy' could do, then she was quite right to think me a dangerous character; but I did feel it a terrible hard thing that she should be so quick to think evil of me. For there was my record and character to show I weren't that sort of man; and though very likely a deeper and craftier chap than me might have felt suspicious about 'Percy' when the old Arab at Alexandria pretty well shoved him down my neck, yet my only doubts at the time was about the parrot's health, not his language. Not for a moment did I dream about his unconscious memory, nor nothing like that. How should I? Then, again, there was Milly, and well I knew her mother's word was law with her, and that she'd no more take me against Mercy White's orders than fly to Jericho. She certainly loved me so dear as ever, but that weren't no good now, and such was my own feeling for Milly that I'd sooner have thrown up the sponge, and stopped fighting for her and let her go free, rather than hear she'd went into a declinement.

In fact it was a cruel sad situation for me, and I could only hope time and the Reverend Tozer would work on Mrs. White and prove to her I was innocent of any such outrageous deed as she thought; and I hoped that living at the Rectory, beyond reach of any fisherman's talk to wake his dark past, 'Percy' would behave and save himself alive. And then Providence, being on my side in the affair, willed that our mine-sweeper got swept away herself, for we nosed into a big one, and was scattered all abroad and sunk, and only three out of the whole crew lived to tell about it. I was among 'em; but I'd got a 'Blighty,' and seemed very like to lose my left leg. After a month in hospital, however, the limb promised to hold to me, and they sent me to England a good bit of a wreck. And I went to Haslar for six weeks and then was allowed home.

Of course, all this time I had letters from Milly, and though she still felt the same to me, even after hearing my leg might come off, unfortunately her mother also felt the same, and she went so far as to say as the sad accident to me might be a judgment. In fact, her keen sense of virtue made her lose sight of charity, as so often happens, and I felt a good bit vexed with Mercy White when I heard she'd took that view. Milly didn't say nothing about the parrot for some time, but when next she wrote and thanked God to hear my leg was spared, she gave 'Percy' a clean bill. He was along with Parson Tozer still and feeling the cold by all accounts, but saying nought it weren't a pleasure to hear.

And then I got home, and it all fell out so pat as a bit of play-acting, for when it was noised abroad I was at my aunt's house in Daleham, of course the skipper of my old trawler, Mr. Friend, and a score of other neighbours came to visit me and hear tell my adventures. And then, having seen Milly for two minutes, all on the quiet unbeknownst to her mother, I ordained I'd call next morning upon Mrs. White at Lavender Cottage and put the case before her in the name of reason and justice and Christian forgiveness. Milly certainly looked wisht and pale; but no outward signs of the fatal declinement was visible to my watchful eye. And she said that my coming home was a blessed fact, which might save the situation for us all, very likely. And so it was. At half after eleven, still walking on two sticks, for I was by no means ready to go back to the War yet, I luffed up and knocked at the door. And Mercy White had seen me come in the garden and stepped out herself, so as Milly should not.

It was a tragical minute, because, when I catched her eyes, I saw in a flash that there weren't going to be no flags flying for me at Lavender Cottage.

"John Spicer," she said. "Hear my words, if you please. You've seen death, they tell me, since you was last to home, and by the will of a watchful Lord, Who well knew you were long ways short of ready for it, you was left without a limb lost and given another chance to save your soul. And, as a Christian woman, I'm very glad indeed of that. And nobody hopes you'll repent and make

a good end, when your time comes, more than what I do. But you did a base and godless deed when you planted that parrot on me, and well you know it. I never will believe you weren't in his secrets, and knew that, soon or late, when he was in a mind to do it, he would strike me to the earth with shame before his blaspheemious tongue. And that's exactly what he did do—Sunday and all, and me trusting the bird, like I'd trust any other of the Lord's innocent creatures, and calling him ' Percy '—a hallowed name in my mind, for private reasons. And it was a very heathen, wicked thing to do, and the man that could do it don't deserve to be married at all in my opinion, and certainly not to an honest, God-fearing piece like Milly. And that's all there is to it, and I hope you'll take my conclusions in a proper spirit, and clear out of this for good and all, and make your peace with your Maker while there's time allowed."

All this was said on the doorstep, and she was going to shut the door when Milly, who had stood behind while she spoke, had her say.

" Jack's listened to you like a gentleman, dear mother, and I'm sure you be far too righteous and honourable a woman not to hear him," says the girl. " And you did ought to ax him in and let him sit in a chair for five minutes, even if 'tis the last time you intend, for he's only a very sick man still, and can't stand very long without feeling his spine-bone coming through his back."

I kept my mouth shut, to see what Mercy White would answer, and after looking with rather a sour eye on Milly she consented, and let me walk in. We went to the kitchen and she pointed to a chair, and I sat down in it, and Milly cleared out and her mother spoke again.

" Nobody shall say I've used you hard," she began, " and if you want to speak before we part you can do so, though I warn you that nothing you can say be going to alter my fixed opinion. I've made this horrible thing a matter of prayer, as you well know I should do. I've been on my knees about it half a score of times, I shouldn't wonder, and my conscience says, so clear as a bell, that we ought to have no dealings with evil, nor yet the appearance of evil; so that lets you out once for all."

I looked at her thoughtful and was surprised to feel how cool I kept, though 'twas life or death in the balance for me, of course.

"I'll ask you this, ma'am," I said. "Will an oath satisfy you?"

"An oath!" she screamed. "Haven't I heard enough oaths, don't you think? No more oaths for me, if you please!"

"I was only going to give one word: that I wish I may die in this chair if I knew anything whatever against my gift to you. I knowed he'd got some foreign words, but what of it? What the head don't understand the heart don't grieve at. And for the rest, so far as I could tell, the bird's tongue was as clean as your own. Never a bad whisper did I hear all the way home from him, and if he'd said one crooked word I'd have done anything on earth with the bird rather than bring him to you. And why for you shouldn't believe me on oath—a man who have never been catched out in a lie in his life—I cannot see."

She considered this and I went on. What I said don't much matter, but presently I could feel I was getting her into a frame of mind when the parrot took a second place, and her own word took the first. In fact, she made that clear, for when I stopped for a rest she said this:

"My word be so good as yours, anyway, and my word, once spoken, have got to be law, for Milly," she answered me. "And I've said in the ear of the nation that you don't marry her. And why for should I go back on that, once publicly spoken, and make myself a scorn?"

"If you can believe me," I answered, "then 'tis a case of circumstances altering the point of view. And I'm sure you be far too famous for large-mindedness and such like not to be able to go back on an opinion formed on a wrong point of view, once you see every reason why you should. And this I will also say, Mrs. White——"

I was interrupted here, because Milly came in and told us the startling news that the Reverend Tozer had called.

"He's in the parlour and wishful to see you, mother," she said; "and when he heard from me that Jack was having a serious tell with you, he said that Providence had

willed for Jack to be here at this critical moment, and he'd like to speak with him too."

Mrs. White looked suspicious, as if it was a plant ; but I assured her that the reverend gentleman weren't there on my account, and that I'd not yet seen him since my return. All the same, my heart was down in my boots, for I terribly feared as the good man had comed to say that ' Percy ' had forgot himself again and all was over for him, if not for me.

But Mercy White, she took off her apron and straightened her cap and went in the parlour, and me and Milly followed after. Parson Tozer was in a very gloomy frame of mind —I could see that at a glance. He shook hands with my girl's mother, and then he shook hands with me and said how pleased he was that I had come through.

" Good news and bad meet us in the same hour," he said, with a sort of a sad shake in his voice. " Such is life, my dear people. Here we welcome Jack back to his home and friends, and, in the same moment, I have something quite sad to tell you all."

" No sorrow at the vicarage, sir, I hope," says Mercy White.

" Perhaps sorrow is too large a word," answered parson. " And yet I do not think so. My little daughter is dissolved in tears ; my wife feels most melancholy and so do I. In a word, poor ' Percy ' has passed away."

" Lor' ! ' Percy' gone home, sir ? " said Milly with a gasp.

" He has. For some days we felt he was failing and I asked the famous Mr. Masson to study the case. He most kindly did so, but took a gloomy view from the first and could offer no hope. In his opinion ' Percy ' was simply worn out. A parrot will go on quietly and uneventfully— sometimes for very nearly a century—and then suddenly, with only the briefest warning, the machine collapses and he is no more. So it has been with this admirable bird. We found him at the bottom of his cage this morning. Needless to say he had died like the gentleman he was. And now, Mrs. White—— " and the holy man turned to Milly's mother with a funeral touch in his voice. " Now, Mrs. White, let us compose our difference in the shadow of

death and suffer this poor, harmless creature, responsible for a very painful estrangement, by his death to undo the harm that he occasioned in his life."

Well, Milly's mother—she hesitated even yet ; and then she asked a curious question.

"Did he speak evil again, your reverence?" she inquired, and Mr. Tozer answered that he never had.

"His last words were 'Polly, put the kettle on,' a week before he died," he answered, "so we can all of us look back and remember them without a pang. And this I will say —I have known parrots before 'Percy,' but never such a good-tempered and genial and jolly fellow. With age had come patience and understanding, and his solitary lapse must not be charged against him, still less against my friend, Jack Spicer. I cannot and will not tolerate any such grievous error among us."

But all the same, it took Mrs. White three more days to crumple up ; and then she forgave me and cried about it ; though never to her dying day was I a favourite of hers. Many a nice gift I gived her after that event, but I couldn't give her a change of heart, and she always linked me with the downfall of having to go back on her word. And I never liked her no more, neither ; because I hate a narrow-minded woman a long-sight worse even than the free, large-hearted sort. And I take back what I said about her being an angel in female form, because she was a lot too much of a fanatical to be an angel at all. The lack of charity put her well into the back row, if you understand me ; and I believe the Reverend Tozer dressed her down about it now and again in private, and I hope he did.

And to show you how amazing faulty may be the judgment of even the cleverest and dearest sweetheart in the world, what d'you think my precious Milly wanted me to do after her mother caved in ?

She said to me, quite serious, "How would it be if you was to have dear 'Percy' stuffed for our drawing-room table, when we get our cottage, Jack ?"

Actually meant it !

"No, Milly," I answered, quite patiently out of my great love for her, "there's little I wouldn't do for you ; but when I remember all that parrot's meant to me, to live with it

under glass as the leading decoration in our new home, be a very ill-convenient thought, if not indecent." In fact I said, " I'd so soon stuff your mother when her turn comes; so we'd best to let bygones be bygones."

And I buried ' Percy ' with my own hands in an old cigar box.

THE ANARCHIST

THE ANARCHIST

NOBODY knew where he got his red opinions; but there they were—a proper, right down anarchist, and full of hard words against every man who wore a black coat even o' Sundays.

Joe Manders was his name, and he was an orphan and lived at the fishing village of Wallcross and worked for old Matthew Ford, in his second boat. He had a room with a fisherman's widow, and, whatever else he might be, he stood to work.

Start Bay, you must know, is a great ground for the crab industry, and Joe was a proper masterpiece in his understanding of the creatures. He knew where all the heaviest crabs walked under the sea, and he put down the pots by a sort of instinct just in the properest places. A rare chap to labour—not an idle bone in his body, you might say—and Mr. Ford thought the world of him, though, of course, he didn't hold with his rash ideas.

"So long as he works for me and earns his money and shows his great understanding of the crabs, I don't care," said old Ford. "I judge young men by what they do, not what they says, and if Joe talks like a fool and believes that a man with a few pence saved is a foe to the people, and so on, then let him. But this I believe; his heart is in the right place."

He said that to Miss Nosworthy, Joe's aunt. She was a very steadfast Conservative, however, and had almost two hundred pounds a year, and her own cottage, all left to her by her father, who had worked for it. So she hadn't no opinion of Joe's anarchy and felt it might land him in trouble some day.

"But be it as it will," said old Ford to Mary Nosworthy, "all fruits have got to be sour afore they're sweet, so you

may live in hope that your nephew will throw over this nonsense and see the dignity and might of capital, as ordained by God Almighty in the nature of things. Capital and labour be cogs of one wheel," said Matthew, "and us have got to see that each does its proper work and learns to trust the other. But the oil of the machine be goodwill, and where shall we find it ?"

"I hope he'll get sense presently," answered Miss Nosworthy—a little, pinicking woman, up home seventy-five years, so brittle as a shrimp owing to her rheumatics, but full of wisdom and with a seeing eye.

"I'd sooner have him than his cousin, Lance, anyways," said old Ford. "Joe haven't got the gentle tongue of Harry Lance, I grant; but then Harry had a secondary education; and he'll follow his father at Three Ways Farm; and his nature is to trust his betters and go to church and so on."

"Harry will come in and pass the time of day," answered old Mary, "and he'll bring me a chicken now and then and a nice parcel of green stuff."

"All to the good," admitted Matthew Ford. "I'm not saying nothing against Harry. I'm only saying I'd sooner have Joe with all his nonsense."

And, being a man so wise as he was kind, the old crabber, next time he had speech with Joe, gave him a hint.

"You see a bit more of your Aunt Mary in your spare time, Joe Manders," he said. "She can't be above ground very much longer in my opinion, for you can look through the old lady's hands very near, and there ain't no more substance to her than a butterfly; so you be attentive and kind to her off and on; and next time you drop in, you can take her a nice, middle-sized crab."

Joe was a dark chap, aged twenty-one, with a handsome but scowling countenance, and a wonderful pair of eyes, so black as coal, yet full of fire. Tall and slim, and nicely put together, but discontented looking, owing to his fixed opinions that the world was going to smash along of labour not getting its share of the spoil.

Now he shook his black hair off his forehead and gave his master a nod.

"If you command," he said.

"I don't command. I only command in working hours,

Joe, and well you know it," answered old Ford, " but I tell you, that you owe your aunt respect—a sort of respect that your cousin Harry don't forget to pay."

Joe Manders sneered.

" And why ? Why do he creep up her sleeve and take her things to eat and agree with every word she says and pretend he's a saint and all that ? Because, well, he knows there's capital hid there what she can't take with her when she drops out. And if you think a socialist born, such as me, would sink to such hookem-snivery ways, I'm sorry, Mister Ford, because I'd sooner starve than dirt my hands with unearned money."

" And quite right, Joe—quite right," answered Matthew mildly. " I know your fine feelings about cash, and what the mischief you'll do some day, when you find yourself making plenty, as you surely will with all your cleverness, be bothered if I can tell. But, meanwhile, your aunt's an old woman, and she was mighty fond of your mother, and there's no law in socialism for a young man not to brighten up his relations now and again."

" I won't brighten up no capitalists," said Joe.

" They might brighten you up, however. I'm not saying you did ought to keep a half-crown in your pocket, or a decent coat on your back, Joe—not if such things run contrary to your high opinions—but I'll ask you to take a real good crab to Miss Nosworthy one day next week, and if she asks you to bide a bit and drink a cup of capitalist tea, I'll thank you to do so."

" Then I will do so," answered Joe, and he obeyed.

He was received affectionately, and his aunt let him run on, because, though a spinster, she'd had a lot to do with men and understood 'em pretty well. And she knew Joe was a very honest boy under his skin.

He ate hearty and fretted and fumed and showed a wondrous warm heart and a great command of memory. For he let out what he'd read in the Labour papers and what he'd heard an open-air orator tell on the subject ; and it was quite clear that he believed every word of it. And Miss Nosworthy listened and pointed out how time was a sure healer.

" Everything that did ought to happen does happen, Joe,

according to the will of God," she said, "so you may be certain that when the Almighty thinks the world be ripe for anarchy—if ever He does—then it will happen, and capital will be abolished. But since the world haven't yet got beyond the stage of capital, us must take things as they are. And, if you want to be a useful man, you must help the world as only it can be helped, by being a wise and powerful man also. And money is power, and you can't tell me there ain't plenty of good, rich men spending their money to help their neighbours."

"I don't know none," said Joe. "Your view be a very cowardly one in my opinion, Aunt Mary. Doles and charities ain't what we want. We want equal rights and chances. Capital handicaps labour to hell; and so it will go on doing for evermore, unless we on my side combine against it and crush the dirty thing, and let the world start fair and clean again."

So he talked, and behind his ideas his aunt saw a big-hearted, earnest chap, so green as a gooseberry, where truth was concerned.

Then who should drop in but Harry Lance. He kissed Miss Nosworthy—a thing what Joe had never done—and he shook hands with his cousin and said he was glad to see him there—which was a lie.

A nice-looking, fair, frank young chap; but he'd got they white eyelashes, which to the seeing eye always mean something up a man's sleeve; and he'd got one of they easy mouths, which mean women—just like some women have got a mouth that means men.

He prattled on, but Joe dried up when he came in, and pretty soon the young fisherman cleared out, for he cherished a natural dislike of Harry. His aunt made Joe promise to come again, however, and his promise he kept; but as time went on and he saw more of her, Joe didn't appear to please her very much. She'd listen, though she'd never argue; and then she found a new sort of restlessness rising up in the young fellow, and he got that bitter and cross-grained there was no biding him.

They quarrelled once over Harry Lance, because Joe said he was after her money; and then he didn't see his aunt no more for two months, till he got a message from

another party to say as she wanted to see him and commanded him to come. And that other party happened to be one Joe could always obey.

Susie Cliff it was; and if the truth had been shown up, I doubt not the people would have found that Susie was responsible for Joe's present temper and doglike way of snarling and cussing everybody in the village. Because much to his surprise and indignation, he'd fallen in love with Susie, and he felt it a shameful thing that a man with his opinions and such big ideas in general, should find himself thinking twice about a chit of a girl.

She was a lovely little piece without a doubt—graceful and pretty, with bright, grey eyes and a good large, red mouth and a mane of pale-brown hair. A very proper hard-working girl was Susie and always busy as a bee. She did chores for Miss Nosworthy of a morning, and the old lady liked her very much and thought well of her sense; but for the most part Susie was too young to be critical, and she thought more hopefully of her fellow creatures as a rule than her mistress did. On the subject of Joe, the maiden would say nothing at all, and when his aunt shook her head about the young man and feared his opinions might make a mess of his life, Susie only hoped not.

"He does a plenty good things on the quiet, Miss Nosworthy," she said, "and he's kind really, though such a fierce fellow by all accounts."

She might have said more, but she did not. She knew Joe was terrible interested in her, and on the day she sought him and told him his aunt was wishful for his company, the affair went farther.

She met the young man coming up from his boat on a summer evening, and he looked at her with a stern face and told her to bide till he'd cleaned himself and then they'd have a tell. Which she did so, and a bit later they walked beside the inland lake at Wallcross.

"I want to let you know a darned queer thing and get it off my chest," began Joe. "Perhaps if I was to tell you, it might be better for me."

"Yes, Joe," she answered, reckoning she knew what was coming, but little guessing how.

"You know my opinions," he said sternly. "Cast iron they are; and among 'em is a feeling that folk are mad to marry young, or marry at all for that matter. I'm against it for all socialists till they get their own back, and knock out the upper classes, and put 'em where they belong. But, despite all that, there's powers in a man beyond his own control seemingly, and I may tell you strict in confidence, Susie, that I'm very much addicted to you. A silly thing without a doubt, but there it is. I love you, in fact, because it can't be for no other reason that you stick in my mind and interfere with my reading and even keep me awake at nights. You don't interfere with my work, nor yet my opinions, because no woman born could do that; but there's no manner of doubt I love you."

"I'm sorry, Joe—if you are," said Susie in a very small voice.

"I wouldn't say I was sorry, but it's terrible ill-convenient," explained Joe. "What I feel is this. I'm dead sure young men didn't ought to wed, with life what it is nowadays, and far bigger things calling them, and dangers ahead. But when I say to myself, 'How would you feel, Manders, if you heard that woman was going to marry somebody else?' when I ax myself that question, I get a powerful sort of feeling for some funny reason I wouldn't like it. And that's love, Susie."

"I suppose it is, Joe."

"Yes, and so I'm rather hoping you can see your way to let me out, so as I can bide true to my own fixed opinions. Of course, I couldn't marry anybody, even if so inclined at present, being poor as a mouse; but if you can honestly tell me that you don't feel nothing like this and ain't addicted to me, or better still, that you love somebody yourself, then my feeling would soon fade away, I expect, and I would do everything to help you. You needn't tell me his name or anything about the chap; but if you was in love by good chance, though I shall be sorry, too, in a way, it'll make it much easier for me to put this nonsense out of my head."

Well, perhaps no girl ever heard anything quite like that before, and most of 'em would have given him a short answer; but she was honest as the morning light, and he'd

put her in a parlous fix, along of the fact that she did love the ground he walked on.

She hedged a bit, seeing she had to speak.

"Most of the labour leaders be married men with families, I believe, Joe," she said.

That ought to have told him he was on dangerous ground, but the young fool only aired his views.

"Most of our leaders be getting big money for leading," he answered. "All very well for them to have wives and families. We pay 'em huge salaries for what they do—too huge in my opinion. They pull in thousands of pounds; and I don't reckon many of 'em be worth so much myself. They talk and run about and lecture us working men; but they're capitalists themselves, to be honest. We can leave them to their own consciences; but if they think they be doing right in having long families and servants to wait on 'em and motor-cars and so on, I do not.

"You stick to facts, Susie. I can't marry, and don't want to, even if I could, along of my duty to the Cause. But if you can say you love somebody yourself, then my conscience is clear and I shall feel a bit freer and no strain on my mind. I ain't good enough for a beautiful, bowerly creature like you, as ought to have the fat of the land yourself, if there was any justice; but I'm just telling you that you've upset my scheme, and so I shall be mortal glad if you can assure me there's no need for me to worry no more."

That done it, and showed Susie how she might tell the truth quick and then leave him to his wonderful opinions.

"I do love a man," she said, and Joe breathed again.

"Thank God!" he replied. "That cuts the knot very clever indeed, Susie. Now I'm free to go my way; and so be you. And if I knew who the man was—but I don't and I don't want to. Good night and good luck."

With that, in his abrupt way, he left her standing by the lake, staring at the water lilies that grew in it; and when the sound of his feet was still and she stood alone, she sat down in the sand and wept buckets.

For he'd been her dream, you see, best part of a year, and she knew he liked her and felt cruel proud of it. But now the poor maid was down and out, in a manner of speaking, and nought left to hope and live for.

A few nights later Joe came to tea with his aunt and he was so glum as a bear and scarce civil to the old lady. He fetched her a lobster, however, but forgot all about it, and Susie found it next morning, outside the door on the mud-scraper, when she was cleaning the step.

"How's the proletariat going on, Joe?" asked Miss Nosworthy, to make conversation, finding her nephew so quiet.

"There's a million and a quarter out of work—that's how they're going on," said Joe. "And to see you eating buttered scones and plum cake is a disgrace, Aunt Mary."

But he didn't quarrel long. He wanted to know something. That fine relief that he'd got when he heard he was free of Susie had worn off, much to his surprise; and it had left a queer feeling that wasn't fine at all. He'd fairly cussed the woman when he found she still stuck in his mind; and he'd lost hope about himself also, because he began to fear that he was weak in his head and wouldn't be much good to the Cause after all.

He came to the subject gradually.

"They tell me," he said, "that the girl as works for you of a morning be tokened. Susie Cliff, I mean."

"First I've heard of it, Joe," answered Miss Nosworthy.

"I thought she might have told you who he was?"

"No. Yet I think she'd have named it. Be you sure?"

"Yes—I had it from her herself."

"Fancy! I'd never have thought that; and I ask if you're sure, Joe, because the child has been a good bit under the weather lately and not herself by no means."

"Perhaps he's chucked her, whoever it was," suggested Joe.

"He may have done that. You young men never know your own minds nowadays."

But her nephew didn't take no note of that challenge.

"If I thought there was a man playing about with her feelings, I'd talk to him," said Joe.

"I hope you would then," answered Miss Nosworthy. "She's a girl in a thousand, in my opinion—too good for most of the Wallcross chaps."

Joe nodded.

"Yes, she is. Do she know Harry Lance?" he asked.

"She knows him; but Harry wouldn't play with a girl's feelings, Joe—a steady, church-going chap like him."

"It wouldn't be the first, however. He jilted Sarah Quickly."

"There was two sides to that. He couldn't be blamed there."

The fisherman scowled as he thought of his cousin.

"He's a tricky toad—Master Harry is—like all them capitalists and fellows that know they're snug."

"He does his work at Three Ways Farm—so his father tells me."

"Yes, his father would. I'll make sure, however."

"Don't you quarrel with Harry, Joe."

But the young man didn't pursue the subject. He was moody and troubled, yet the facts he had revealed rather pleased his aunt. She'd felt for a good bit that a wife like Susie Cliff might very like put sense into Joe; and that her nephew was evidently considering Susie in a jealous spirit cheered her a bit. But her hope died pretty quick when he went off, for she asked herself, very naturally, what a cheerful and hopeful creature like Susie would see in such a scowling, sour-tongued lad.

"Unless," thought the old woman, "she had the cleverness to know all his wild opinions come of good sense turned upside down—same as I do; but how can you expect an ignorant girl to see that?"

She remembered, however, that Susie always stood up for Joe and knew about kind things he'd done, so she didn't fling over hope, for she knew exceeding well that the rash youth was sound at heart.

The next thing that her nephew meant to happen was a row between himself and his cousin, Harry, because the love-sick young idiot had got it into his head that his cousin must be the man who was vexing Susie. But a streak of sense come to him the last moment, and he bethought him that he'd go so far as to ask Susie first if Harry Lance was the man. Because he granted to his stupid self that it would be a pity to fall out with Harry unless the reason was big enough. So he tackled Susie in his savage way; and he ordered her to walk with him after dark one evening out towards the Start Lighthouse.

Of course she obeyed, and when they met and got going, Joe said :

" I hear from a private source, Susie Cliff, that you be a good bit under the weather."

She didn't say " yes " nor " no " to that, but kept silent.

" If it's true, there's a reason for it," declared the young fellow, " and the reason I'm wishful to know. Because, though you're lost to me in a manner of speaking, me being marked for a bachelor and you wanting some other and likelier chap, yet I'm still interested in your career, I may tell you ; and it's whispered to me that this here unknown you care about ain't treating you none too well. And if the love's all on your side, or if he's changed his mind, then, feeling what I do, I'm wishful to talk to the man and bring him to reason mighty quick.

" My sweeping ideas don't give me time for silly little fusses between man and man, nor nothing like that ; but where you're concerned," says Joe, " I'll take it on and put sense into him. And if it's my cousin, Harry Lance, I'll thank you to let me know, because a chap like him would be dust in my hands."

" Harry's got nothing to do with me," said she. " We're very good friends ; but whenever he's serious about a girl, then you may be sure that girl will have got money. He'll be friendly with any girl ; but he won't marry nought but a rich one."

" Money's his god, as we all know. Well, that lets him out, then ; and I'm rather sorry, I may tell you, for I'd so soon have a row with him as anybody, him being against all progress except his own—a selfish dog. But if it isn't him, no doubt it's somebody else and all's one to me where you're concerned."

Again Susie went dumb.

" By your silence," he said, " you grant I'm right. Very well then. There's a man treating you unkind and I won't have it—I won't have it, Susie. If he's offered to marry you, and you be such a fool as to think you'll be happier along with him than on your own, then married you shall be ; or else you shall have him up for breach. Tell me the man's name and leave the rest to me."

"Don't you worry about me, Joe; I'm all right," answered Susie. "There's other things to think of besides men. I'm troubled about a woman for the minute; far more than any man; and that's your Aunt Mary. She's failing and ought to see the doctor, I'm sure."

"That may or may not be," answered Joe; "but one thing at a time, please. You can't choke me off like a child. There's a man fretting you and you don't deny it, and I'll have his name afore we part company to-night."

"You won't have it, Joe," said the girl, firm and sharp, 'for the good reason I ain't going to tell you."

"Think twice," he answered her. "I'm pretty clever and far-seeing, and I haven't got into politics and all that for nothing. An anarchist I may be, as they say, but I know when to take direct action, as we call it, and when to keep inside the British Constitution. You tell me the man and I'll go for him well inside the constitution and the law, as it stands at present. I won't knock his silly head off nor nothing like that. I'll just argue patient and sensible, and tell him not to make a hateful fool of himself and hurt your feelings; and I'll drop a skilful hint in his stupid ear that you're one in a thousand and the best and finest creature ever come out of Wallcross and so on. Then the blighter will soon creep back and feed out of your hand, no doubt, and give you no more trouble. And if he's saucy and minded to throw you over, or any such wickedness as that, then I'll put it across him and blamed soon bring him to heel."

"Very kind and thoughtful of you, Joe, I'm sure," said Susie, not knowing very well whether to laugh or cry; "but 'twill be cleverer all round, I think, if I don't mention the chap to you."

"And why not? Shouldn't a far-seeing man like me understand how to handle the fool?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid," said Susie; and then, of course, Joe began to get hot.

"Cuss all women!" he said. "Be blessed if any sane man did ought to have any truck with 'em. They stand in our light and they stand in their own. Here am I —a chap a bit out of the common by all accounts—and I offer to take trouble for you, and, like a little zany, you—

however, it ain't too late for you to change your mind, I suppose. So best to do so."

"I never shall change my mind about him," vowed Susie, though she trembled while she spoke; "and as for you, Joe, you are out of the common, as you truly say. But —but I can't very well tell you who he is; and be it as it will, I shall never marry him—I'm sure I shan't, so there's no call to worry you."

"He's thrown you over then?"

"Yes. He's like you—won't marry, I expect."

"Then he's a dog and never ought to have told you he cared for you; and whether you give me his name or not, I'll find it out and run him down and let him know how he looks in the eyes of every decent man."

"I'd a lot rather you didn't trouble, dear Joe."

"It won't be no trouble," he answered her. "It'll be a pleasure to strip that wretch naked and point the finger of scorn at him. The men here be a lot too fond of philandering and then changing their minds. That's the sort Harry Lance is, and I won't stand for 'em."

"Please, please leave it, Joe! I—I love him still, you see, and I wouldn't like for any harm to over-get him."

"More fool you, then. You ought to have a properer pride, I reckon. 'Tis weak-minded girls like you give love-hunting creatures like him their chance. I thought better of you, as you well knew; but I shan't no more. You're a poor thing, Susie Cliff."

"Poor every way, Joe," said Susie, and then she did begin to cry; but it was dark and he didn't know it. He stormed a bit, and she answered not a syllable; and then he lost his temper and used a lot of crooked words and said he'd find the chap and scrag the life out of him, whether Susie loved him or not. And then he turned on his heel and left her all alone.

He cussed himself to bed and to sleep, full of resolves to make an example of the faithless scamp, and wishing all the time it was his cousin Harry; but the very next morning that happened to make him forget everything but his own affairs; for he was eating his breakfast when Susie Cliff herself, with fatal news, rushed into the cottage where he dwelt. She'd gone as usual to Miss Nosworthy's at six

of the clock, to light the fire and tidy up and carry the old woman a cup of tea and a rusk, what she always took before rising up; but when Susie did so, and went into the bedroom, there was old Mary kneeling by her bed in prayer!

A very righteous creature always; but Susie never remembered to see her praying like that before her morning cup of tea. So she called out, and Miss Nosworthy didn't move, and Susie went over to her and found her stone-cold and dead as a fish. She died saying her evening prayers, you see, and she'd been kneeling there quite dead since nine o'clock the night afore and she was stiff as a board, poor dear. A beautiful end, but very difficult for the undertakers.

So Susie fled and gave the alarm, and women went into the house, and a policeman also. All sorts of things got about—that Miss Nosworthy had been murdered for her Sheffield candlesticks, and so on; but it was proved a natural death, and the doctor knew all about her state and weren't surprised. So, when the folk heard there wouldn't be no inquest, they calmed down, and after the funeral, to which Miss Nosworthy's relations come in a black swarm, knowing her so well-to-do, the will was read out. Harry Lance and his mother were there, and Miss Worthington, and two nieces of Mary's from Plymouth. In fact the only relation of the lot that didn't turn up was Joe Manders. For, after the funeral, well knowing there'd be nought for him, he doffed his black and went to the crab pots.

But wonders never cease, as they say. His aunt had left one hundred pounds to Harry Lance, and all her silver to her nieces, and a mourning ring to Mrs. Lance, and fifty pounds to Mr. Matthew Ford for old friendship's sake, and a hundred to Susie Cliff; but all the rest—the bulk of her money, and her house, and every darned thing, to Joe!

It shocked the other relations a good deal, for they hardly knew him more than by name, as the dark spot in the family; but law's law and nobody could say Mary Nosworthy had been out of her mind, or anything like that.

The thing sped on its own wings, as such wonders will, and though none of his relations was upon Wallcross beach to tell Joe the news when he came ashore that evening, his

master, Matthew Ford done so; and there he was when Joe landed, and he said:

"Joseph Manders, your aunt's will have been read, and I may tell you that I knew the contents of it six months ago, when she made it, me being her oldest friend, and you'll be glad to know she's left me fifty of the best—free of legacy duty also."

Joe nodded.

"I am glad," he said. "I thought Harry Lance would have the lot."

"He's got a hundred, and another here and there be down for a trifle; but you are her sole residuary legatee."

"And what might that mean?" asked Joe. "She knew my views on capital, poor old dear."

"It means," explained Mr. Ford, "that you scoop the lot, my bold hero. You're a capitalist, Joe—a bloated profiteer, Joe—rich with money you never earned, Joe—one of the sort as should be put up against a wall and shot out of hand, my lad!"

"Hell!" said Joe.

Of course he had to go through with it, and likewise, of course, being only a human young fellow, he couldn't help liking the taste. But he thought very steadfast against the temptation it offered, and was full of generous, but foggy, ideas as to his duty. Two things troubled him in secret from the very first; and one concerned himself and the other somebody else. But time had to pass, and it was a fortnight or more before he brought his difficulties to his master; for though Matthew Ford was a capitalist himself and, as such, not to be trusted too far, still Joe knew him to be honest as the day, and couldn't deny that the old man had done many acts worthy of a socialist and been tolerable decent to his poorer neighbours according to his limited lights.

First, however, Joe went orderly to work and gave Susie a month's notice, because there weren't no Mary Nosworthy to wait on no more. And if ever his hard heart was touched, it was when he thought upon his Aunt Mary and her trust in him.

"She believed in me," he told Matt Ford—"the first as ever did."

He had a mourning card printed about her—with a border of black and silver and a tea-urn on a pedestal under a weeping willow tree—all very nice indeed—and he sent it out to everybody, his relations included; and he also let them know that, when the time come, he should put up a fine, sizable cross of moor stone, or perhaps white marble, over her grave. But the family weren't overmuch interested.

And then he paid an evening visit to Matt Ford, which was, in a manner of speaking, the turning-point in his life.

They drank tea, and Matt lighted his pipe and Joe explained his fine resolves.

"There's two things you can help me with, master," began the young man. He hated the word "master," but he still worked for the boat owner and meant so to continue.

"There's two things," said Joe, "and I'll take the big one first. It stands like this. My aunt's property, cash and house and sticks, mounts up to a bit over four thousand pounds; and all that hugeous dollop of money's mine; and how she came to leave it to me, the Lord knows!"

"So do I, Joe," said Mr. Ford. "She left it to you because she was a very far-sighted old bird. She felt what you wanted to steady you down and make you a useful chap was responsibility; and now you've got it. She reckoned that, under your sour rind, you had an honest heart, that only wanted time to ripen and make you a sane and valuable sort of man. And I hope she was right."

"I hope she was," answered Joe. "Anyway, this is my resolve. There's more than a million out-of-works in England at this minute, and though I don't know much about capital, and don't want to do so, I reckon that four thousand pounds is going a tidy way to take off the strain for a bit. That money put in the right channels is going to give all those poor fellows a breathing space and a little passing comfort. If 'twas only for a month, it would take the load off their minds and provide a bit of meat for their wives and families. And I'm going to sell up all and send 'em the lot. And I'll take it kindly of you to tell me how it's to be done."

Mr. Ford nodded.

"A very big and handsome idea, Joe, and meantime you'll go on working for me?"

"Yes, I will, then—till things be altered in the world, and you capitalists be all put out and equality comes in."

"Fine, Joe—quite what I should have expected from your high opinions. And I'll be glad to help, I'm sure."

The old man rose up, went to his desk and fetched out a bit of paper and pencil.

"We'll just go into figures, Joe, and put it down in black and white. Four thousand pounds is a dollop of money, as you say, and a million out-of-works is a dollop of men. But there's nothing like figures for throwing light on these problems, and as figures haven't come your way yet, along of no education, I can help you there."

Joe didn't answer and Matt made some calculations. He worked slow and sure for a quarter of an hour; then he sat up, lighted his pipe again and spoke.

"A pound is two hundred and forty pennies, Joe, and ten pounds be two thousand, four hundred pennies. Multiply that by ten again and you find a hundred pounds be twenty-four thousand pennies."

"Why for d'you fetch it down to pennies?" asked Joe impatiently.

"I'm telling you," replied the old man. "Let me flow on, Joe."

Then he continued.

"Now a thousand pounds comes out at no less than two hundred and forty thousand pennies; and since you've got four thousand pounds to burn, you command no less than nine hundred and sixty thousand pennies. So there you are, Joe. Hand over your pennies to the out-of-works and there'll be just about enough to give the poor heroes one box of matches all round. That you can do; but no more."

"Not a penny for each of 'em?" gasped Joe.

"If you was to dole out pennies to 'em, my dear, there would still be forty thousand penniless."

"Damn capital!" said Joe.

"Far from it. I'm only showing you that to help a million men wants a braver bit of cash than the likes of

you and me will ever see. But now I'll tell you what I'd do—not speaking as a capitalist, Joe, but as a friend to you and all poor folk. You can't do much for a million ; but you can do a proper useful stroke for thirty ; and since charity begins at home, I'd advise like this. You be listening ? "

" Yes, I be listening," the boy answered.

" Very well, then ; since things are as they are and socialism is not yet in view, because, while this country thinks it hates ' protection,' it knows it hates your opinions a jolly sight worse, I should do this. You well know the fishermen here badly want a rest house and shelter—a nice place handy to the beach, where they could get a fire and a cup of cocoa in winter and meet and talk with their eyes on the Bay. Such a shelter would be bringing a powerful lot of comfort and cheer to your own neighbours, Joe ; and for the price of three hundred pounds, or maybe less, a very commodious and fine affair could be set up. The food and drink would pay for themselves, and I can see a great addition to Wallcross in that way—a good, worthy piece of work.

" Then, for the rest, you buy your own boat, and take up your proper, licensed job as a crabber ; and presently you find yourself lucky enough to give useful, well-paid work to other men. And every man in steady work is one less unemployed and one more to the good. You go and live in your own house, and earn your own money, and enlarge your ideas, and cut your coat according to your cloth, and help your poorer neighbours when you can, and just wait, patient and dignified, for anarchy to come along in God's own time. What about that, Joe ? "

" Do you mean I could lift up a proper brick and slate shelter for the fishermen ? "

" Certainly I do. A practical thing showing your opinions—a proper sign and covenant that you're a red-hot anarchist, Joe—a building as lasting and useful in its way as Start Lighthouse itself."

" I'll do it ! " cried Joe. " I'll go to Dartmouth to-morrow, if you'll let me off for the day, and tell a builder to start on it this minute."

" So you shall, then. And don't forget your own boat

and a bit of work for one of our chaps out of a job. And when you leave me, then I can give another man a job ; so that will be two in work. The place shall be called the 'Manders Shelter,' so as you won't be forgot in time to come."

"No, by God!" swore Joe. "It shall be called the 'Mary Nosworthy Shelter'! 'Tis her money, not mine."

He was full of excitement and Matt Ford smiled at him.

Joe rattled on for half an hour ; and then he remembered the other affair.

"You've done me a power of good, master, and I thank you, I'm sure. If anybody had told me I couldn't help the whole of labour with my money, I never would have trusted 'em ; but no doubt figures can't lie. And the other affair is that girl, Susie Cliff."

"I know her very well," said Matt.

"She tended my aunt, and I find she's in love with some fool, and he's treating her bad. I may tell you in strict confidence, I think a lot of the woman ; and if my opinions were different, would have offered for her myself ; but I found she cared for another man and I felt very pleased to know it—at the time. But he's no mortal good, it seems, and she won't tell me his name, so I can tackle him and knock decency into him."

"I know his name, Joe," said Mr. Ford, thoughtful-like.

"Would you feel any objection to letting me have it, master?"

"It's like this, Joe. The man can well afford to marry her. He's in an excellent position, honest, clean-living and healthy—just the sort of man that even you would say might be trusted with a hand in the next generation. And on his own showing he's fond of Susie."

"Then why the mischief do the lunatic hang fire?"

"That I couldn't tell you. I haven't axed him. But perhaps you might find out if you went to headquarters in your fearless way. A lunatic no doubt, as you say. His name's Joe Manders."

GREAT-UNCLE CAUNTER AND THE JEW

GREAT-UNCLE CAUNTER AND THE JEW

THOUGH it was such a power of years back, I can very well mind the story, for my great-uncle Caunter used to tell it to his dying day; an' that took place in the year 1870, when he was up ninety years old, an' I was a boy of twelve. His adventure fell out not far distant from the beginning of last century, an' it happened with the ancient man, same as it do with most of us, that the older he got the clearer his youth grew in his mind. For it do look almost as if folks' memories run in a circle an' fetch back to the starting-place at the end, same as a hare runs.

You must know that a little more than a hundred years ago Dartymoor regular woke up, an' from being rather a lonely old place, growed so busy that you'd hardly go five miles anyway without coming to men working, an' roads being cut, an' walls rising, an' houses running up.

Certain wise men had suddenly found Dartymoor, so to say, an' they gived out that 'twas a shameful waste of virgin land. So a few with money an' brains set to work to reclaim the desert, an' a lot wi' money an' no brains tried to do the same.

"Newtake" farms, as we call 'em, springed up like mushrooms on a warm autumn night; an' to this day you'll see the ruins of 'em in many a lew spot scattered all over the place, for you can't tame Dartymoor really, an' you can't turn hungry peat into good-natured soil, do what you will. Where a few prospered, a many failed; but there was one thing that suddenly appeared in the middle of Dartymoor that didn't fail, but succeeded very well for a very ugly purpose, an' that was Prince Town War Prison.

For old as it do look, an' bleak an' bare, an' so deep-rooted in the Moor as the tors all round about it, Prince Town village han't much more than a hundred years of age

yet, if them as understand books speak truth. Anyway, it wasn't near so old as great-uncle Caunter. But fust comed the prison, then the public-houses, an' then the church, what the prisoners was set to build with their own hands to keep 'em out of mischief, an' give a serious turn to their minds, poor souls.

You see, we were at bitter fighting with the French an' Americans, an' 'twas "which he should," as we say—first one looked like winning, then t'other. "Boney," he was going to make England his pleasure-house, an' the Yankees did all they could to help him do it. But, as time went on, we got the whip-hand of 'em both, according to our custom in such matters, an' there comed into our power thousands an' thousands of prisoners from both enemies; chiefly sailors from their fighting-ships, they was.

Where to put 'em comed to be a very difficult question, an' so Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt—the Lord Warden, an' a mighty man in every Dartymoor mind—he ups an' says to the Prince of Wales of them days: "Why for don't you give the Government a bit of Dartymoor to build a War Prison upon, your Highness?" or words meaning the same. Of course, Dartymoor belonged to the Prince; so his Royal Highness answers: "Done with you!"—only in gentleman's language; an' up goes the War Prison afore you'd think there was time to have drawed out the plans of it. Two huge great round walls, one inside t'other, an' the prison houses in the midst. Sir Thomas laid the foundation-stone, an' the place was called Prince Town, because a bit of a hamlet soon rose up, an' the prisoners was set to build the church as I told 'e, an' cots an' drinking-houses an' bake-houses an' barracks for the soldiers all went to swell the place; for you can't have ten thousand an' more lively foreign soldiers an' sailors under lock an' key without a bit of fuss.

The Frenchmen were always reported pretty quiet, for they sang an' acted plays an' gambled an' amused themselves with thinking how 'twould be when their god "Boney" had his way an' comed wi' his Old Guard to set 'em free; but the American men was different. Their god was Liberty, an' the way they tried to get at it, an' the things they did, an' the manner they climbed over the

walls an' burrowed under 'em an' got free a thousand ways by magical contrivances, would no doubt make a very pretty book if 'twas all set down.

You see, the country people was allowed in the War Prison for market, an' they sold eggs an' butter an' cheese an' vegetables an' such like to the prisoners as could find pence to buy 'em. But the Americans made use of these Moor folk in all sorts of crafty fashions, an' one man there was, by name of Anson, as got clear off in a maiden's clothes, what she brought for love of the fine fellow, hidden under a basket of cabbages. Others did other clever things, an' some sent some very perfect forgeries of money out into the world—for there were all sorts of rascals shut up in that limbo, an' a good few heroes too.

My great-uncle Caunter was a lively young blade in them days, an' he had a farm down to Merrivale, where Walkham river runs under great Mis Tor an' a few tired-looking houses be seen straggling up the hill, like a row of weary folks walking home after a revel.

Higher Staple it was called—Joe Caunter's farm, I mean ; an' the house stood near the road to Tavistock, an' the farm stretched out behind. He was a well-to-do man, and trusted not to crops, but cattle-rearing, as all wise folk do in those parts to this day ; and among other ways of making good money, he found the prison market useful for it was handy, an' he could always count to sell what he'd got to sell. I've heard him say 'twas a very good testimony to human nature how the rich prisoners would buy food for their poorer comrades, an' how them that were well would take their good things to them that were sick ; for a few gentlemen amongst 'em had money, but the most part none. An' many sick there was, for small-pox took 'em like flies in a frost, an' owing to the poor food and rubbishy clothes, a many died—an' a many was glad to die. Besides, I do believe, come winter, not a few was frozen to death in their hammocks, for a lot of most awful things surely did happen. But they as suffered there be all dust now, an' mostly in a happy place, no doubt. 'Twas only their duty landed 'em on Dartymoor, an', like a good few since their time, they lived to find the wages of duty will

often happen to be a long sight worse than the wages of sin. The world's full of puzzling things like to that, as no doubt you've found out for yourself without my telling you, if you be a thinking man, an' not ready to take the blessings of God an' your own good luck for granted, till it changes—like most do.

Among many other folk as did pretty regular business at the War Prison was a lot of Jews from Plymouth an' Exeter. They chiefly dealt in clothes an' shoe-leather; an' as the British Government was most cursedly mean with the rags it voted for the prisoners to be clothed in, them as could do so were very ready to change their wretched rubbish for such garments as the merchants brought.

The country people trafficked a bit also with these Hebrew gentlemen, an' they was missed not a little when the War Prison was shut up an' they gived over coming to Dartymoor. For most of 'em were honest men, but one was not, an' I'm just coming to him.

It fell out one winter, just afore Christmas, that great-aunt Tamsin—she died the year I was born—happened to be away for a few days from Higher Staple Farm, an' her husband, thinking to please her, cast about what he should get for her Christmas present. They was both young an' peart, an' very good friends; but they never had no childer, so what would have gone in li'l boots an' socks often took the shape of some pretty gift for her instead. Though her'd a deal rather have had a babby than a golden crown, according to the usual feeling of childless women a hundred year ago.

Great-uncle, he was that busy he couldn't go nowheres to buy his lady anything, an' the day afore she comed home to him he growed desperate. He was standing in front of the threshing barn, wondering whatever he'd do about it, an' half in a mind to get on his pony an' trot off to Tavistock that instant moment, when who should come in sight but a Jew pedlar on his way to Prince Town. The man stopped an' looked up at that huge hill which rises east of Merrivale bridge, an' axed my great-uncle how far 'twas to the War Prison. So Joe Caunter telled him, an' not liking the expression of his face, was going to let him move on without more words, when the Jew offered to open

his pack, an' do a bit of business while he rested his bones before he tackled the hill.

"If you've got a wife, I'll show her something that'll please her very much," he says, little thinking that he was doing just the very thing most likely to make a customer of great-uncle Joe.

"I have, an' you've come in the nick of time," answers great-uncle, "so ope your pack, an' let's have a look."

The Jew was a very tall, brown-faced man, wi' a heavy nose an' blubbery lips, an' a beard like a bush. The picture of Moses in our family Bible was the living likeness of him, so great-uncle used to say—except that Moses had horns an' this chap hadn't; though, as my old man assured us, he did ought to have had horns, an' a tail too.

The Jew spread his pack, an' little enough there was in it to please great-uncle Joe, for he'd got mostly old clothes for the prisoners; but some bright handkerchiefs he had, an' a few trinkrums in cases as particular took farmer's fancy. Joe Caunter had enjoyed a very good year, an', as his lady didn't possess no precious metals beyond the gold of her wedding-ring, the fantastic idea took her husband to give his wife something quite out of the common. Seeing what a reckless frame of mind great-uncle 'peared to be in, the Jew spread out his store of trash, an' then showed a trifle or two with sparkling stones stuck in 'em. I do believe great-uncle was quite blinded by all that glitter. But he had sense to shake his head, an' say that such wonders were not for the likes of him.

Then the Jew began all the tricks of his trade, an' poured out words like snow from a winter cloud. He explained as he'd got the things off a bankrupt, as had to give 'em away almost to keep himself from prison. An' the Jew said that he'd got 'em for such a song that he was able to sell again dirt-cheap an' yet make his own fair profit.

"You can't sell di'monds cheap," says great-uncle, "for the earth don't breed 'em quick enough. Gold may go cheap—though I don't know as I'd heard it had come down in price of late—but di'monds an' rubies an' such like never was cheap, an' never will be. Any fool knows that."

Well, the Jew allowed it was so, an' told great-uncle that he was a very clever chap. Then he took out a gold brooch wi' two white stones in it an' a blue one.

"There are small di'monds, it is true," he said, "but the blue stone—'sophia,' 'twas called, my great-uncle thought —"the blue stone is very, very good and large; yet you shall have this lovely brooch for five pounds."

The price surprised farmer, for he thought the man would say twenty at the least—such a glittering affair it was, an' real di'monds to it; but, of course, he didn't show any astonishment.

"Five pounds—five fiddlesticks!" he answered in his lofty way. "Why, I bet I'd get a better thing for less than half that price to Plymouth."

"Where?" asks the Jew. "Tell me where, an' I'll give you this magnificent brooch for nothing. Five pounds is absurdly cheap, an' I couldn't do it but for what I told you. 'Twill be an heirloom for your children, young man, an' every year 'twill get more an' more up in value."

He twisted an' turned it about as he talked, an' it twinkled up in my great-uncle's eyes till it pretty near dazzled him. Just like the charms us hangs on a horse's head an' collar, to catch the evil eye an' keep it off beast or driver, so this here brooch caught his eye an' held it.

They talked an' talked, an' presently the Jew shows a few more things, but somehow that brooch had taken my great-uncle's fancy. Already he seemed to see it under great-aunt Tamsin's pretty chin, an' no doubt pictured the stir to worship on Christmas Day when the neighbours catched sight of that precious jewel a-glittering, as if Mr. Caunter had got a star out of the sky for her Christmas-box. But still, well-to-do though he was, he didn't feel he ought to spend five pound all to once on a simple luxury like that. He was torn in half between thinking of Tamsin's joy if he got it for her an' his own conscience if he made such a dip in his profits all to once.

So in his turn he tried for to bargain.

"I'll give 'e three pound for thicky," he said, coming back to the brooch careless like, after he'd seed all the other things.

But the Jew wouldn't budge. He only said that Father

Abraham well knewed he was axing the lowest price possible in justice.

"I'll give 'e three ten, so hand it over an' let's waste no more words," says great-uncle, holding out his hand as if the thing was done.

But still the Jew wouldn't hear of it. Of course he seed by now that t'other was dead set upon the brooch, an' he knowed that he had only to be firm to get his money.

At last, after a lot more talk about Father Abraham, the Jew bated his price by five shilling, and handed over the brooch for four pound fifteen. He throwed in a little box for it, an' great-uncle gived him a glass of old cider to wet the bargain. So off he tramped up the hill, an' though Joe Caunter's inner voice pricked him pretty sharp for such a spendthrift trick, yet the buyer weren't sorry altogether. He only wished his wife would come home quick, for she was a lovely young woman an' a loving one, an' he well knowed that her kisses, when she seed the brooch, would soon help him to forget the hole in his savings.

Home comed Tamsin presently, an' when he told her about the gift she was like a child as hangs up its stocking on Christmas Eve. But she couldn't wait an hour, of course; an' though he was content to bide for her gift to him—a waistcoat of lamb's-wool, wi' red buttons, 'twas, as he always would tell in the story, poor old dear!—she couldn't wait for his to her, and out it had to come; and she was afore the looking-glass afore you could count five.

But a black Christmas overtook 'em notwithstanding, for though Tamsin's brooch glittered brave enough at church, an' did all that was expected of it in the way of keeping the other females' eyes off the books an' on Mrs. Caunter's bosom, yet, afore the holy day was out, as luck would have it, young Luke Westcombe, son of Westcombe of the Fortune of War Inn, a youth apprenticed to a jeweller at Plymouth, comed over to see the Caunters and have a chat, being a friend of great-uncle Joe's. Well, they showed him the toy with pride, an' he looked at it an' took it to the light an' handled it cunning, being well used to such things.

"I lay you'll never guess the price now," said great-uncle.

Then the young man answered—to Mrs. Caunter:

"I'm very sorry to break it to you, ma'am, but your brooch be no more made of gold than Joe's watch-chain be, an' these here stones ban't no more di'monds an' a sophia than my teeth. 'Twas a very clever trick of gold washed over a heavy amalgam of base metal; an' the stones be glass, wi' tin-foil under 'em."

Then he took his knife again an' scratched the gold, an' showed the rubbish under it; then he fetched off the sophia an' the crystals, an' melted 'em in a red-hot fire so easy as you'd melt a piece of cheese.

"Well, I be gormed," said Joe Caunter. "An' I gived the gert, black-haired, hook-nosed toad four pound fifteen an' a drink of cider for it!"

"A shilling to two shilling would have been the price to Plymouth," said the young man; an' great-uncle suddenly laughed out loud, despite his wife's li'l mouth trembling for tears.

"I told the rogue I could get the thing for less than half the money to Plymouth," he answered; "but be blessed if I knowed I was telling such a solemn truth when I said it!"

"He've done you, no doubt," said the young man.

"So he have," allowed Joe Caunter. "But mark this, I'll have my money again out of that hookem-snivey rascal, if I've got to wait ten years to get it! No man ever yet bested me," said great-uncle, "an' I ain't going to let a gert, ugly foreign Jew, wi' a nose like a tor, chouse me out of four pound fifteen shilling. So you can cheer up, Tamsin, my dear, for I'll get the money back for 'e, soon or late."

"'Tis what the people will say," she answered him. "'Tis bitter enough to lose the brooch; but when Mrs. Coombes, an' Mrs. Mudge, an' Jane Coaker an' Mary Jane Reynolds, an' Ann Snell begin to say how sorry they are for me—'tis then I shall suffer."

II.

Years went by, an' great-aunt Tamsin forgot her trouble; but she never could abide a "Johnny Fortnight" from that day forward. An', behind her back, her good

man used to say that, after all, the money hadn't been wasted, since Tamsin was so short as a watch-dog with travelling packmen an' pedlars from that day forward. An' Jews especially she couldn't abide—no more could her husband. Sharp as a hawk he was to catch the chap as had robbed him, for 'twas quite so much the laughter as the loss of the money made him sting for days after—as Tamsin knowed it would better than he did—not to mention all my great-aunt herself said about it in private to him, as was never known. But the black-bearded chap never comed that way again—or, if he did, my people never catched sight of him.

Then at last the blessing of peace was proclaimed, an' the President of the United States agreed to it an' signed it, an' sent it back. Then there began a rare confusion an' bustle to the War Prison, getting all them thousands of men off to home again. It took a time as must have seemed cruel long for them, an' scores ran away, an' some grew tired of waiting an' made all the trouble they could; an' a few poor fellows lost their lives over it. But it don't do to talk of all that. There was faults on both sides, an' them as done the wrong an' them as suffered it have made it up afore now in a better world; for what happens down here belike don't look as serious, seen in a bird's-eye view from eternity, as it do to us while we are grinning an' bearing. A many runned away anyhow, for they held that since the declaration of peace they was all free, and had a right to go first chance that offered. But a deal of trouble comed of it, an' Government offered three pound reward to anybody as would catch any runaway an' bring him back to Prince Town. Quite a bit of money was picked up that way, an' 'twas whispered that a few of the Yankees themselves made a tidy sum escaping, for they'd tell the market people wi' a wink where they'd be found to, an' then the Moor folk would catch 'em an' march 'em back very solemn to prison, wi' a gert flourish of trumpets, an' share the three pound with 'em next market day! But some wasn't so kind as that, an' many was really catched escaping, an' not a few made hunting for bloodhounds; an' scores of 'em got clean off an' fetched down to Tor Quay or Dartmouth, an' then over to France, an' so back home again.

It was just at this time that the end of the brooch story comed to be told. Of course, after the peace Jews swarmed at the prison, an' even the small-pox an' prison evil that reigned there didn't fright 'em. They came with outfits of clothes for the prisoners, as hadn't more than rags to their backs very often, an' a good brisk business they done, an' very hard bargains they drove by all accounts.

Well, great-uncle Joe happened one day to be going along to Tavistock, thinking of a case where one of these blessed Jews had catched a runaway prisoner, an' wishing in his heart as he'd been there to help the Yankee, when who should he see coming slap along the Tavistock road towards him but his old friend of the brooch! A hundred yards off did he mark the man by his nose an' thick beard an' black eyes; an' his first thought was to go for him there an' then, an' get his money's worth out of him, an' give him such a dressing down as he'd never had in all his born days until that hour. But then a fine fancy comed to great-uncle—the grandest idea that ever did come to him in his long life for sartain; an' he called to mind the play-actors as he'd seen to the War Prison; for they'd often do a stage play there to keep up their spirits. So the minute the Jew catches sight of him, great-uncle limps off the road an' runs a little way, an' crouches down behind a rock on the heath, an' lies aquott, like a hare in her forme.

'Twas all open common round about, an' not a soul in sight but them two; so farmer he peeps round the rock an' the Jew he stands still an' looks so keen as a razor, an' puts down his pack to think what he shall do. First of all great-uncle was afraid as the beggaring old Jew would be frightened of him; but he wasn't seemingly. He comed over to the rock an' speaks very civil an' kind.

"You are tired and hungry, perhaps, that you sit there, my poor friend?" he asks.

"I'm all right," answered the other. "Just looking at the weather, that's all. I'm not sure if it will rain. An' which is the way ter Tavistock town, stranger?"

Great-uncle, of course, attended the prison markets regular, an' he knew just how the Yankees talked. Now he put it on, an' imitated their speech, an' said how he was

durned if he wasn't tarnation glad he'd met somebody to have a palaver with.

"Where have you come from?" asks the Jew in a very amiable tone of voice.

"No matter. 'Tis where I'm going is the thing. But I'm so footsore with walking over this old bowery of a desert that I can't get much further," said great-uncle.

"Come with me," said the Jew. "I'm going to Tavistock. I'll walk along with you, an' you can take my arm to help you."

Of course, the old rascal was bound for the prison, as t'other very well knowed, but he kept it up an' pretended he was very much obliged.

"Thank you kindly," said great-uncle Caunter.

"I'll give you some better clothes than those," declared the Jew. "I deal in them."

"Thank you kindly, I'm sure," said Joe Caunter again. "I could do with a better fit, I allow, than this smock. You've got a good face, an' wouldn't have a down on a poor sailor man, I'm sure," he goes on to say. "Ter tell you the truth, there's a lot of Yankees running away just now from the War Prison. An' who shall blame 'em? But if they are caught an' taken back the men as catches 'em gets three pound sterling, so I'm told."

As if the Jew didn't know it! He thought the money was so good as in his pocket, no doubt.

"I can't give you the three pound, but I'll give you all I've got upon me, which be a dollar," said great-uncle.

"I'll befriend you," answered the Jew. "You trust me an' give me your money an' I'll help you out of the country."

"You'd better get something on wheels then, for I've run a hundred miles an' I can't go no more," said great-uncle, handing over his four shilling.

The Jew thought, but he didn't see what was to be done. Then he catched sight of something that the other man had marked already before he spoke—namely, a strange waggon 'pon the way. So the Jew he runs to the road an' stops the waggoner an' offers the man a shilling to take him an' the Yankee sailor he'd catched to Prince Town. But he said that out of earshot of great-uncle; an' he also told the

driver not to speak a word before the prisoner because the Yankee thought that he was going to be took to Tavistock.

This chap fallen in with the scheme very willing after he'd bargained for ten shilling instead of one. Then the Jew helped great-uncle into the waggon, an' he pretended to be dead lame an' very tired. After that the pedlar hoisted in his pack an' climbed up himself. So away they went very gaily.

"Now we'll soon have you safe from the soldiers," says the Jew, winking to the driver, an' great-uncle gets down to the bottom of the cart an' tells 'em to stop at the first place where he can have a bit of food an' a drop of drink. Then, to play into the Jew's hands all he knowed, he curled up at the bottom of the cart an' whistled "Yankee Doodle" for a bit, and presently pretended to go to sleep. Of course, nothing couldn't have happened better to please the Jew. So suddenly, while great-uncle Caunter snored away so loud as he knowed how, he felt a touch at his wrists and another at his knees and ankles. The driver hadn't got no rope; but he'd took off the reins an' gived 'em to the Jew to strap up his prisoner, while he walked along an' led his horse into Prince Town.

Of course, when he felt he was so tight as a spider in a web, great-uncle waked up again an' made a pretty to-do, an' shouted and swore an' used all the strong Yankee words he'd heard, of which there was a pretty fair variety. But the Jew never seed through the joke, an' he just laughed in great-uncle's face, an' chuckled to think what a smart thing he'd done.

He told great-uncle, as cool as a frog, what he'd planned for him, an' said that if he wanted for to escape an' go to Tavistock now 'twould cost him three pound ten. An' his prisoner fumed an' cussed an' made all the noise he could till he seed that the Englishman walking at the horse's head was beginning to get sorry for him. Then he shut up, for if the chap as owned the horse an' waggon had taken great-uncle's part an' set about the Jew, an' loosed my old man an' kicked t'other into the road with his pack after him, 'twould have spoiled all the sport.

So great-uncle shut up, an' pretended for to sulk, an' presently they comed in grand style to the gates of the War

Prison. Then the Jew telled a lot of fine lies as to how he'd catched the Yankee runaway out 'pon the Moor, an' run ten mile after him an' took him single-handed; and the turnkeys was very glad to hear it, an' they opened the gates to welcome the prisoner back again. Then they drove great-uncle Joe in, an' the Jew began to fancy himself as big a hero as Joshua afore him, when he delivered up the runaway bound hand an' foot. So they carried the farmer in an' stood him up afore all the soldiers an' chaps.

"What d'you say to that?" cries the Jew. "I catched the rascal single-handed, I tell you; and a rare chase he gave me."

"What for?" axes a soldier as had known great-uncle for more'n a year—"what for did you want to catch him? This here man's Joe Caunter," he says.

"I don't care what his name is," says the Jew, "I've got him. Down by the river he was—half-way to Tavistock; an' but for me he would be clean off by this time."

"An' what say you, Joe?" axes a turnkey.

Then my great-uncle told his story.

"I only know that I was marching along very cheerful about my business when up to me comes this here man wi' the nose, an' t'other chap drove past soon arter. We both was going to have a lift to Tavistock with the waggoner, as I thought, but, afore you could look round, that long chap there he'd slipped off the reins, an' this black gentleman had tied 'em round my hands an' feet as you see. An' if a heathen Jew can do that sort of thing on the high road in the middle of the afternoon, 'tis about time I left Higher Staple Farm an' looked somewhere else for a living. Black an' blue I be, I do assure 'e. 'Tis a disgrace to the nation, so all's said."

"He spoke to me like an American, an' he swore like one. If he's a native, he tried to deceive me," began the Jew, when great-uncle interrupted him.

"Tit for tat, my ugly rogue! You don't call home they gold brooches three year back? You don't remember how you swindled me one Christmas with your trash, an' brought tears to my young woman's eyes when she comed to know what you'd sold was rubbish? But I remember very well; an' I remember your nose, like to a elephant's, an

your wicked eyes, an' all the rest of you. Now you've got served wi' your own sauce, an' right well do you deserve it."

The Jew talked a lot, an' made no end of a fuss, but great-uncle Joe was a favourite at the prison, an' everybody took his side. Besides, it comed out that one or two prisoners remembered the old Jew quite as well as great-uncle, an' they made a rare shindy when they seed him again, an' gived him a hotter welcome than ever he'd bargained for. In fact, they skinned the man pretty well afore they'd done with him ; an' after that the waggoner made him pay thirty shillings for the reins as he'd cut up. An' at last my great-uncle marches the man to Commandant Cottrell—the head of the prison—an' tells the whole story from first to last an' calls for damages.

" There's a damned sight too many of these chaps swarming up here, your honour," says great-uncle, " an' I ax that an example be made. Our lives ban't safe against 'em. Here be I an innocent, hardworking chap, well known from here to Plymouth ; an' he treats me like a runaway sailor ; an' 'tis no better than assault an' battery. I ax you to be judge if it ban't. Every man jack of 'em ought to be sent back to Jerusalem, an' you're the hero to do it, Commandant," he says.

Well, the Commandant happened to hate these Jews terrible bad himself, so judgment went all one way, an' the wretched chap had to give great-uncle back his dollar an' pay him five golden pounds down on the spot, which he done with a lot of red-hot language ; an' which great-uncle took home that very same evening to great-aunt Tamsin. 'Twas for him to demean himself like a great man afore her then, an' no doubt he did.

Joe Caunter always ended his story the same way—with the words that his wife said to him when he comed back. He was terrible proud of 'em, an' them words were about the only part of his story he didn't alter a bit now an' again ; but he'd never forgotten what she said when he told her what he'd done an' counted the money into her hand.

" There ! " she cried ; " if you ban't the biggest masterpiece 'pon all Dartymoor ! A reg'lar right down wonder, to be sure. You always did say as you'd get upsides wi' that anointed rascal some day ; an' now you have ; an' I always

knowed you would, for that matter. To think how cunning you foxed the man and got your own again! An' I love 'e for it, better'n ever I thought I could!"

With that speech, she kissed him on both cheeks. Leastways great-uncle Joe always ended the story by saying she did.

THE END

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Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.

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Hutchinson's Important New Books

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By TICKNER EDWARDES

Author of "The Honey-Star," "Tansy," "The Seventh Wave," etc.

As in all this author's previous books, the scene of this powerful and romantic novel is laid in a remote village in the South Down country which he has made essentially his own. Into a captivating story is subtly woven a charming and original contribution to the solution of an ever-perplexing problem—whether, in respect of holy matrimony, the ancient adage, "Better late than never," holds good or otherwise. With its vivid characterisation, humour, pathos and intense dramatic interest—above all, in the lovable personality of its heroine—this novel will certainly rank as one of the most successful of Mr. Edwardes' creations.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Colin the Second — By E. F. BENSON

Author of " Colin," " Dodo," etc.

This is the story of Colin the Second, a young Earl who seems to have all the world at his feet. He is married to a beautiful and devoted wife and possesses unbounded wealth. The adulation of the world is his. But yet he has to conform to the ruling compact which one of his far-back ancestors made that in return for his soul the devil should grant him wealth and prosperity in this world. He and his satanic master have only one enemy to fear—love. This book is the story of his wife's love for him and its struggle with the evil forces which surround him. In this novel Mr. Benson not only reproduces the characters of his former book, but adds many new pen portraits of characters about whom the action of the present tale revolves.

The Lady in the Cellar

By MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

Author of " Good Old Anna," " The Terriford Mystery," etc.

" The Lady in the Cellar " is at once a murder mystery and a study of modern society, and especially of modern girlhood. The lives and fortunes of two girls, who, though they never meet, are invisibly and terribly linked together, form the theme of this exciting story. In a sense, " The Lady in the Cellar " is a study of the social and moral aftermath of the War. The story opens with a village wedding in the October of 1918, but the rest of the book is concerned with events which occur in the most exclusive section of London society four years later.

As a Shadow Grows — By F. HORACE ROSE

Author of " Just a Darling," etc.

This is a fine story of Africa. It tells of a man who in self-defence kills the father of the woman he loves. In a weak moment he conceals his action from the world and it lies hidden from all but himself and his wife. It grows as a shadow grows until at last it threatens to part them. But she, loving him and yet sorrowing for his weakness, insists that he shall make full confession. He allows, however, an innocent man to suffer for his crime, and the story tells how finally he makes amends.

For Love of a Sinner

By ROBERT GORDON ANDERSON

" For Love of a Sinner " tells the exploits of Messire François, the tavern brawler, the troubadour saint and cynic. He is a man with a price on his head, with wit on his tongue, with the sparkle of the eternal lover in his eye. He is the poet of the wayside, with words glamorous enough to win a princess, spiritual enough to woo a nun. The shadow of the gibbet is his background, the sword his companion, the whole of France his prize. He knows not fear nor veneration—nor remorse. The world is his precious trinket to cram into the sagging pocket of his ragged wine-coloured jerkin. Mr. Anderson's hero is of the stuff of Cyrano de Bergerac, of Falstaff, and of every romantic ne'er-do-well who has won hearts from the beginning of time.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Life—and Erica — By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," "Gerald Cranston's Lady," etc.

"Life—and Erica" is undoubtedly the most human novel which Gilbert Frankau has so far written. But it is something more than this. It is an analysis, pitiless yet accurate, of the modern spirit in modern womanhood. Most readers will quarrel with it, and a few will positively hate it, but the majority will agree that Mr. Frankau has accomplished the task which he set himself. The fact that this book ends on a strong religious motive will not come as a surprise to those who have studied this author's other works as they deserve to be studied—thoroughly.

The Treasure of Ali Mubarak

By RAYMUND M. CLARK

Here is a brilliant and vividly-written story of a treasure hunt in Egypt, which tells of two young men in Government employ who are given an ancient document by an old Sheikh to whom they were of service. Filled with curiosity and an adventurous spirit, they endeavour to translate the mysterious paper. Upon slender and obscure instructions they set off in search, but progress is retarded by the outbreak of the Great War. Some few years later, the two friends are again thrown together, and they renew their search. Many terrible yet exciting adventures befall them, including their gruesome experience with the raving Satyr who steals clothes from corpses. Some magic spell—a curse in fact—protects the hidden treasure, and the culmination of the thrilling episodes makes impressive reading.

Doctor Ricardo — By WILLIAM GARRETT

Author of "Friday to Monday."

Here is a fine thrilling original detective story. Mystery after mystery peeps out at the reader from every page, and thrill after thrill carries the action along at break-neck speed to the final exciting *dénouement*. It is the story of how Drew, the famous detective, solves the mystery of the murder of Louis Farrell. There are many false clues and blind alleys before the murderer is finally run to earth. When he is, the final scene turns out to be thrilling and unexpected to the reader and characters alike.

Queen of the Dawn : A Love Tale of Old Egypt

By H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "Heu-Heu, or The Monster," "Wisdom's Daughter," etc.

This is a book of that romantic and mystic type which Rider Haggard has made peculiarly his own. It tells of Old Egypt and its Shepherd King. The heroine, daughter of the legitimate king, is forced to flee from the palace owing to the tyranny of the People of the Dawn. She goes to live among the Pyramids, and there is seen by the son of the Shepherd King, who has come with an Embassy. For her sake he incurs the wrath of his father, and in the end their love heals the feud which exists between their two peoples.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Vagabond Harvest — By URSULA BLOOM

Author of "The Great Beginning," etc.

In her latest book the author of "The Great Beginning" has taken a new theme round which to weave her story. For this story emphasises that, among the many things which claim attention at the present day, the things that really matter are still life and love. Hedda, the beautiful Zigani gipsy, loves Raphael, a dreamer, a musician, and a violinist of genius. In a weak moment, tempted by the lure of gold and jewels, she puts aside her rustic lover and marries a man who has wealth and position but a selfish and scheming nature. Later she leaves him and returns to her gipsy, leaving behind, however, her child. The *dénouement* of this story is written with skill, and brings to a close in a surprising manner a well-told story.

The Villa by the Sea — By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Carina," "Anna Nugent," "Children of the Shadow," etc.

The scene of Miss Isabel Clarke's new long novel is laid in Italy in a lonely villa by the sea. Donald Harnett, the supposed son of Professor and Mrs. Harnett, grows up there in complete ignorance of the secret of his birth. He has no experience of any other life until at the age of twenty-one he goes to England to stay with some cousins. He returns to the villa bringing with him his cousin Pauline, now an orphan. An averted crime leads to strange disclosures, and the story ends in happiness for the chief characters.

Soundings — By A. HAMILTON GIBBS

This is the story of the spiritual and sentimental adventures of a clever girl before and during the War. She meets and loves a young Oxford undergraduate, but he refuses to marry her. She still loves him, but devotes herself to art and becomes a well-known and popular painter. Then, during the War, she again meets her former lover, and feeling that he is the one man in the world for her she asks him to marry her. Her constancy after his brutal behaviour wakes true love in his heart, and so she gains happiness in the end. Like his distinguished brothers, Sir Philip Gibbs and Mr. Cosmo Hamilton, the author has a fine literary style.

The Seven Sleepers — By "ASRAK"

It is rarely that one gets a really brilliant detective story. "The Seven Sleepers," however, may be regarded as of this order It tells of the machinations of a cold, hard, astute villain and the efforts which are made to bring him to justice. The author has a remarkably engaging style and carries his readers along from one thrill to another with great skill. The ending, too, is startling in its originality.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Canoe Builders

By H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "Ocean Tramps," "Golden Ballast," etc.

"The Canoe Builders" is the last and strangest of the three complete novels that form the "Blue Lagoon" trilogy, books unlike any other books, dealing with the Pacific Ocean of the time of Pease and Steinberger and exhibiting Nature and Nature's people under the steadily-growing menace of civilisation. "The Canoe Builders" shows the last stand of the canoe against the sailing ship.

Following the Grass

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Out of the Silent North," "Suzanna," etc.

In the days upon which the story opens the Union Pacific Railroad had not been completed. The West was largely "Indian country." Range was free; fences unknown. But already the cattle outfits, big and small, had united in the warning that sheepmen must stay out. The Basques —herders for centuries—were already in California. The great drought of 1862 began. The grass was gone. They had to follow it, as sheepmen ever have done. Nevada became their goal. Received with hatred and contempt, they repaid in kind. In a powerful story of such verisimilitude that at times it seems more like history than fiction, the author tells the story of what they accomplished there, of the part they played in the upbuilding of Nevada, of their isolation. Mr. Drago knows Nevada, as he has proven before.

Trevalion

By W. E. NORRIS

Author of "Next of Kin," "Brown Amber," etc.

The scene is laid in Cornwall and deals with the fortunes and misfortunes of a family long established in that country. The hero—or at least the principal figure—is the elder son and heir, a young man whose life is clouded by an episode in the War which seemed to show him as having lacked courage at a critical moment. He is not really a coward, and no one thinks he is; yet, as he cannot from the nature of the case absolutely clear himself, he remains oppressed by that shadow throughout. His vicissitudes, amatory and otherwise, make this an interesting and absorbing story.

The House of the Seven Keys

By MARY E. and THOMAS W. HANSHEW

Author of "The Amber Junk," "The House of Discord," etc.

This is the clever story of a jewel robbery and of the efforts which are made to solve the mystery. The plot is woven with great skill and the reader is led forward from incident to thrilling incident until the final *dénouement*. The characterisation is subtle; and so startling is the element of reality that the reader feels that he is obtaining a real view of the underworld from its pages.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Allen Adair — By JANE MANDER

Author of " The Strange Attraction," etc.

This fine story tells of a man who in the town is a complete failure, yet finds that his life in the open country is a success. He marries a simple, rather narrow-minded girl ; and this is the story of the life of these two in New Zealand and of the conflict between his ideals and her temperament. The author of this book has succeeded with rare skill in creating the atmosphere of a New Zealand ranch. It is a story of the pioneers of Empire.

Shoe-Bar Stratton — By JOSEPH B. AMES

A story of love and adventure set in the Western cow country, which is nowadays adding to its perennial lure the prospect of sudden dazzling fortune through oil wells. Mr. Ames transports his readers to the great open spaces with their far horizons, and plunges them into the thrilling battle a plucky girl is waging to save her ranch. Strange things are happening at the Shoe-Bar—and she has no clue to them. The cowboys do not stay, disaster pursues the herds—from cattle-rustlers to blackleg. Stratton, wounded in the World War, recovers his memory after the lapse of a year. He returns to his ranch and finds it in the hands of a girl who inherited it from her father. He decides to work there as a cowboy, determine the innocence or complicity of the girl, fathom the rumours or queer happenings. There is action, suspense, interest, and an appealing love story.

The Hand of a Thousand Rings — By ROBERT BACHMANN

This is a delightful volume of short stories all of which have a Chinese setting. Mr. Robert Bachmann has a real knowledge of the Chinese : he has more, he has an understanding and sympathy for them. He knows their ways, their habits, their minds ; he understands what gives them pleasure and what gives them pain. In this book he draws with a delightfully facile pen Chinese men and maidens in many circumstances. Each story is complete in itself. Thrills alternate with clever description, and the whole atmosphere of the book is redolent of the mystery and subtlety of the East.

Oak and Iron — JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of " Beyond the Outposts," " Without Gloves," etc.

David Gaunt, strong man of the North, met and married Jean McDougall. She is reported drowned, and Gaunt marries again. This time, however, he has chosen a soulless woman whose chief aim in life is pleasure and comfort. She hates the rugged existence of the North. This marriage has a strange and fearful outcome, and the children of the two marriages are caused much unhappiness. With great skill the author deftly weaves his strange plot. The story, however, by reason of a strange discovery, ends in happiness.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Rector of Wyck — By MAY SINCLAIR

Author of "A Cure of Souls," "Arnold Waterlow" (*8th edition*), etc.

In John Crawford, Rector of Wyck, Miss May Sinclair vividly portrays the ideal country parson, a strong, unselfish soul beloved throughout his life of constant well-doing from one end of his parish to the other. His wife, formerly a light-hearted, cynical society girl who had professed herself to be an infidel, is drawn gently by his love back to the Christian belief. From his children John Crawford has high hopes, but his son turns out a wastrel and his daughter a prig. This novel is a most powerful and compelling psychological study in which four distinctly different characters stand out in strong relief against a cleverly-drawn background.

Temescal — By H. H. KNIBBS

Author of "Wild Horses," "Partners of Chance," etc.

A man of mystery is Temescal, broad-browed, benevolent, slow and wise in speech, quick and sometimes violent in action. Through fortune and misfortune Temescal maintains his serene and kindly outlook on his fellowmen. Throughout his startling Mexican adventures he is the epitome of ancient wisdom and almost godlike comprehension. He is also whimsical, humorous and charming. Among the many Western novels such a story as "Temescal" stands out for its richness of characterisation, for its beauty of style and for originality of situation. The story is, in its way, an epic of golden sunshine and the rainbow-tinted beauty of the desert.

The World We Live In — By ALGERNON CECIL

Betty, an aristocratic and fashionable girl, marries a Labour Member of Parliament. Their different views and temperaments naturally conflict, and there is nothing for it but divorce. Betty's next adventure in matrimony is a rich, ambitious young peer who looks upon her merely as an adornment to his home and as an aid to his own political advancement. She leaves him and goes to Rome, where her first husband meets her and finds that he still loves her. There is an interesting ending to this well-told story of to-day.

The Amber Merchant — By PEGGY WEBLING

Author of "Boundary House," "The Fruitless Orchard," etc.

This is a tale of love in London, beginning six years ago and ending at the time when the last page is turned. The interest centres around two sisters, Florence and Edith Wortley. The former is a bright, sophisticated girl, who earns her living, until she marries, as an artist's model She will be found, by the way, very different from the artists' models of impossible romance or sordid adventure. Edith is a dim reflection—a far-away echo of her sister. The amber merchant, so named in mockery by his first customer, keeps a shop in Vauxhall Bridge Road which is ordinary enough to outward seeming, but with a hidden, mysterious stock of great price. Amber glows on every page of the book, and all that can be told of its history and age-long charm, its attraction and many values, is interwoven with the story of Florence Wortley and her lover.

The Ace of Blades By CHARLES B. STILSON

Part Author of "The Island God Forgot"

This is the tale of Denys, an unknown boy whom a broken-down master of the sword bought at a gipsy camp-fire and trained into an incomparable swordsman, whom a great King's selfishness summoned from obscurity and sent on a mad errand, the echoes of whose sword-music set all North France to ringing, whose blade unaided kept Louis Quatorze firm on his throne and saved France from the Spaniard, who cut a way through treacheries to riches and honour, and who won at the point of his long rapier something more precious in his eyes than them all. This is the tale of a red-haired girl. The story is told with spirit and fire, steel crosses steel, and a red-haired girl's heart beats fast; two horses drip lather, and one has run her heart out; but the honour of France is safe.

A Romance of Three Ladies By J. G. SARASIN

Author of "Chronicles of a Cavalier," etc.

This is the thrilling story of the "Night-Hawk," a Royalist of the time of the French Revolution, who has planned to get the Dauphin out of prison. With skill and daring he impersonates one of the Revolutionary generals, and while so disguised he is seen and loved by Lady Marne. Later she learns that he is not a Revolutionary, but her great love survives this ordeal. She sees the Revolutionary general guillotined and believes that her lover has suffered death. His flair for adventure, however, brings the "Night-Hawk" through all dangers, and later in England the lovers are united.

The Autocrat By PEARL DOLES BELL

Author of "Sandra," etc.

This is the story of a woman who comes to see her real self. The selfish, pampered, designing product of an effete civilisation. The author in this book gives a psychological analysis of a woman's soul that has not been surpassed by any other writer of the day. "The Autocrat" is a story that grips both the emotions and the imagination: a story that alternately bids for pity and condemnation for the proud daughter of a long line who believes herself helplessly enmeshed through an alliance with one of an alien race.

The Rangers' Code By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Black Star," etc.

When Sheriff Tom Thomas sizes up Dick Ganley as a likely man to be sent as a deputy to Cactusville, he explains to the young adventurer from Texas that Cactusville is run by a gang of bad men. The head of the gang is called "The King of Cactusville," but no one knows who he really is. Ganley sets out to break the gang. The first move, however, of his enemies is to kidnap the young girl whom he loves. The rogue who runs Cactusville is the man responsible. He takes the girl to an isolated cabin and there offers her the alternative of marriage or dishonour. The thrilling outcome of this story is told in masterly style, and the attention of the reader is held to the very end.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Fleurette of Four Corners — By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," "The Kiss," etc., etc.

"Fleurette of Four Corners," alias Mlle. de Crespigny, of Old France, is a beautiful girl living with her father, who has sought refuge in an old château on the bank of the Ottawa River. She is persecuted by the attentions of a scoundrel who has a hold on her father and wishes to marry her. Her lover comes from France to find her, and the villain of the story promptly proceeds to get him out of the way, an attempt which is frustrated by "Old Man" Evans, his friend Ikey, and Mr. Burgin's immortal mule, Miss Wilks. The story is full of incident, with many pathetic and humorous scenes, and shows the author at his best when Fleurette rides out of the story even as she had ridden into it, and the two old cronies are left happily together.

Her Story and His: A Story of a Trial Marriage — By HER AND HIM

This is the story of a young and beautiful New England woman who is married to and divorced by a detestable millionaire and of a young English author whom she afterwards loves. Despite her puritanism he persuades her to live with him, and for long months they are happy. Then she discovers that he is unfaithful and, heartbroken, leaves him. The book is written in a new and original fashion. Both the woman and the man relate the story of their love, and the reader obtains the experience of having the temperaments and characters of both put before him by their narratives. This book forms both an interesting tale and a clever psychological study.

The Mystery of the Summerhouse — By HORACE HUTCHINSON

Author of "The Fate of Osmund Brett," etc.

A woman, young, beautiful, well-born, rich—murdered; a husband suspected, almost beyond possibility of doubt; later exonerated no less completely; her lover condemned to death as her murderer; and the final solving of the mystery—these are the main elements in the story, whose principal aim is to show how easily and how convincingly the innocent may be found guilty in the eye of the law.

Little Tiger — By ANTHONY HOPE

Author of "The Dolly Dialogues," etc.

The author of "The Dolly Dialogues" has here written another brilliant story, sparkling with epigrams and full of brilliant descriptions. Against the vivacious and very modern background of London life, the gay, yet half tragic figure of the stranger from overseas stands out vividly. Bewildered, yet excited, joyous yet fearing, she treads the new path that opens before her with all its prospects and all its adventure. Then, when it narrows down to the great choice, dark and uncertain though the issue is, she stakes her fate boldly, without a backward glance.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Whisper on the Stair By LYON MEARSON

The weirdness and mystery of a lonely, "haunted" house creep into every line of this thrilling story. The stairs creak at night and silent shadows slip along the walls. "Dead" men return from the grave; living, intangible "ghosts" come and go. The thrills are continuous. The reader is swept along on a brimming tide of uncanny adventures that leap from one baffling chapter to another.

Ropes of Sand By M. P. WILLCOCKS

A middle-aged man and woman have done well in the world together, but chiefly through the woman's power and charm. Circumstances then bring the man, Firmin Bradbeer, back to the surroundings in which he passed his childhood. There he reveals what has always lain dormant in him before the eyes of his wife. It is as though a curtain goes up before her. The tale is one of a crime and its consequences, and of the "pull" of the soil on those who really belong to it.

Driftwood
By the BARONESS ALBERT SADOINE

This poignant story tells of Elizabeth, a young and beautiful widow who is of a weak and vacillating nature. In trying to break away from her smart and dashing set, she becomes engaged to an Englishman who is solid, clean and honourable. Business takes him to America, and Elizabeth, left alone without the protecting influence of her lover, endeavours to numb the loneliness by joining her set down south. There she meets an Italian nobleman, who falls deeply in love with her. The girl is attracted yet somewhat frightened, and leaves Rome for a friend's estate in Northern Italy. To this place the Italian follows her, and in a weak moment she succumbs to his ardent wooing. He is observed emerging from the girl's bedroom by his late mistress who, mad with jealousy, tells the Englishman of his fiancée's betrayal. The ending of this thrilling story is instinct with drama.

The Flame in the South By LUKE HANSARD

His father having been killed in a movement to free his country, a boy is brought up in a dull Victorian home in England. Blood, however, is too strong. He goes out to join Garibaldi, and fights in a successful campaign. Out there he meets a girl whom he loves, and though they are unsuited, he marries her. Once more the Italians are called upon to make a last effort to save their country. He hastens to join them. He finds on his return that his wife has deserted him. Time passes by until, in 1914, he finds that Europe is again in arms. An old man, he leaves once more for Italy, and there dies gloriously in the service of his beloved country.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Voice from the Dark By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The Red Redmaynes," "The Grey Room," "The Three Brothers," "Redcliff," etc.

Here is a tale of mystery and adventure written with great originality and power. It ranks with the best efforts of Poe, that master of the dramatic thrill. It deals with a crime so monstrous and cruel as to challenge credibility. Yet, with that deft simplicity which is the mark of genius, the author shows us how, in truth, it might have come about. And with fitting preservation of reality and logic he carries us step by step along the dark and devious road of his theme without an instant's faltering of the swift, compelling pace, to an astounding climax of retributive justice, ingenious, convincing, and heartily satisfying.

"OM" By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Guns of the Gods," etc.

Mr. Talbot Mundy's new and exciting story, "OM," is considered to be the best thing he has ever written. Critics who were privileged to hear the manuscript read aloud have called it "a second 'Kim,'" and there is no doubt that this stirring tale of the East is going to be immensely popular.

Criminal Yarns By T. C. BRIDGES

This is a cleverly-written book of stories dealing with the criminal, his character and his habits. They are written by one who knows his subject. The author is especially ingenious in his stories of convicts escaping and the complications that ensue. These stories are not merely sensational, but have a distinctly human touch.

Johndover By MARGARET CAMERON

Author of "The Involuntary Chaperon," "Tangles," etc.

The story of Ned Proctor, who elopes with the girl of his heart. They are pursued by the girl's uncle Amos, whom Ned knocks down. Amos hits his head on a stone and dies, and Ned is sent to prison, but escapes and goes to California as John Dover. There, after some thirty years, he finally settles down at Santa Barbara, where he is highly respected. One Frederick Barclay, born ten years after his uncle Amos was killed, visits Santa Barbara and meets a charming and vivacious young widow, Judith Kent, who introduces him to her very dear friend "John Dover." Frederick sees a striking resemblance to one of the Proctor family, but decides that this cannot be the wild Ned Proctor he has heard about. Finally he learns the truth. By this time he is madly in love with Judith and greatly admires old John. How, through his puritanical respect for "the law," he feels bound to denounce John as an escaped convict, and how finally he succeeds in getting an official pardon for John, is the stirring *dénouement* of this vivid story.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Carolinian — By RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "The Sea Hawk," "The Snare," "Scaramouche," "The Tavern Knight," etc.

A romance of South Carolina in the days when England's power over her American colonies was in the balance; when the sturdy independences of the Colonials was asserting itself against the misguided rule of George III.'s satellites. Against this background is enacted the drama of the lives of the intrepid young Carolinian, Harry Latimer, and Myrtle, the beautiful girl coming from the opposite political camp, whom he makes his wife. The story is fashioned as only the master-hand of Rafael Sabatini could fashion it, and the deeds of Washington and others whose names have become immortal form thrilling themes which are closely interwoven with the narrative of the book.

A Saharan Love-story — By A. L. VINCENT

This is the story of a girl who, for wealth and position, sacrifices her life and marries a rich satyr. His cruelty and neglect at length break her heart, and following some rash words of hers he is found dead. How she tries to return to her former lover, and how he in disgust leaves her form the *dénouement* of this striking story.

The Second Establishment — By DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "They Also Serve," etc.

This story tells of a man who has no real home. He is wealthy but unhappy, for his wife is hard, callous, and self-satisfied. One day he meets his ideal mate and her need calls to his. Ill-treated, and mentally tortured by a husband who is an abominable drug-fiend, she is glad to find sanctuary in the shelter of her lover's arms. Together they live a simple and happy home life in a busy quarter of London. The ending to their romance comes in startling and dramatic fashion

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The Candlestick Makers — By LUCILLE BORDEN

Author of "The Gates of Olivet."

In this new book Mrs. Borden, who will be pleasantly remembered for her novel of last year, "The Gates of Olivet," tells a story of Society life which touches upon certain vital problems of the day. The sharply-drawn characters include Diana Travers, whose eagerness for life and new experience brings her near to tragedy, which she is able to avert only by her innate wholesomeness and idealism; simple, sweet-minded Faith; Uncle Michael, who longs so for children of his own, but has only a dream child; Hilda, Michael's wife—hard, selfish, and unhappy; Hana, Matsuo, and Passiflore, a fascinating trio whose lives are embedded in mystery; and Donald, Diana's lover. These are but a few of the interesting men and women whom the reader will enjoy meeting.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Mystery of the Evil Eye By ANTHONY WYNNE

A thrilling and vividly-written detective story which is quite above the average. Sir William Armand, a prominent lawyer, is found murdered in a Northumbrian wood near his home immediately after he has ordered his daughter to break off her engagement with the man she loves. A certain Dr. Hailey, who is in touch with Scotland Yard, takes up the baffling case. A multiplicity of clues present themselves, but the girl's unfortunate fiancé is arrested as the murderer. With consummate skill, Dr. Hailey unexpectedly solves the perplexing mystery, and the guilty parties reap their just reward. The unique methods of Dr. Hailey are brilliant, and he is destined to attract a vast audience of admirers.

The Threshold of Fear By ARTHUR J. REES

Author of "Cups of Silence," etc.

This is the extraordinary story of a young man, of whom it is foretold that the beating of a drum will warn him of his death. While living on a remote Cornish moor he hears at the dead of night the dreadful drum-beats. Does this really foretell his death? Is it the work of an enemy? Are the sounds made by a supernatural agency? These are the questions which present themselves. Their solution forms the startling and vividly-written *dénouement* of this novel.

The Gold Cat By ARTHUR MILLS

Author of "The Yellow Dragon."

This is an original and intenseiy-exciting mystery story. It tells of a search for treasure in South America. The hero is an Englishman of resource and daring, and his adventures carry one from climax to climax. The whole story is written with a knowledge of South America and its history which is truly astonishing. It is a book which will thrill from the first line to the last.

The Wonderful Wooing By DOUGLAS WALSHE

This is the original story of how a debonair ex-officer of the Royal Air Force wins the woman he loves. Martin Hayward by chance buys a pamphlet dealing with the constructive power of thought. Though he scoffs at its advance, he unconsciously puts it into practice, and it enables him to meet the girl of his dreams, an heiress in her own right. Then through sheer strength of purpose he at last wins his lady's hand from a much-favoured rival.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Up Hill, Down Dale — By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of " Redcliff," " The Three Brothers," etc.

Eden Phillpotts is already well known as a short story writer. He weaves his plots with great ingenuity and a true vein of humour around Devonshire characters. In this volume he has collected some of his best stories. They will appeal to all interested in the short story and to all lovers of fiction.

The Green Ray — By VANCE THOMPSON

Author of " The Pointed Tower," " Spinners of Life," etc.

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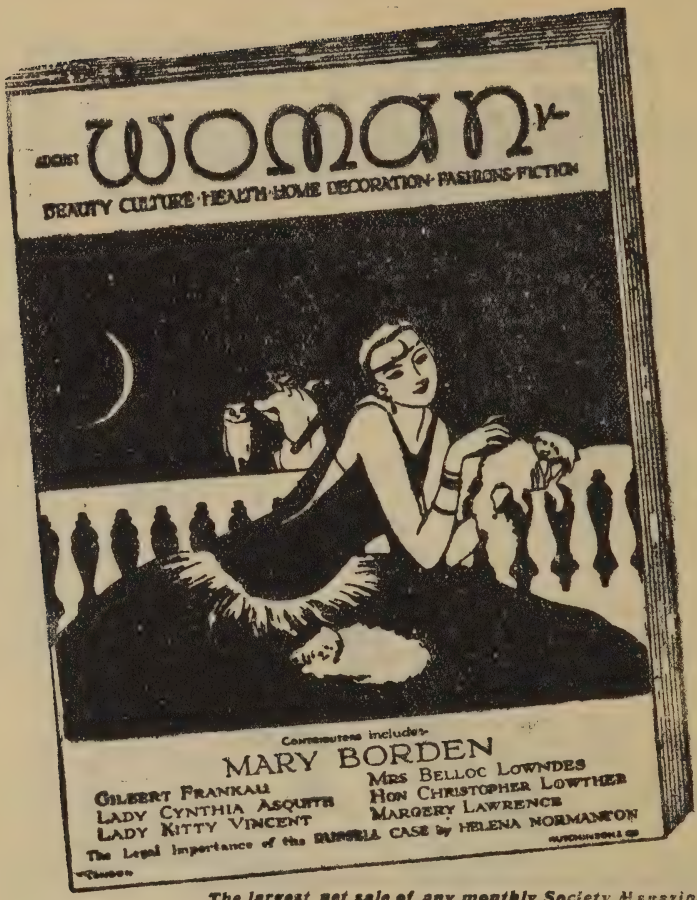

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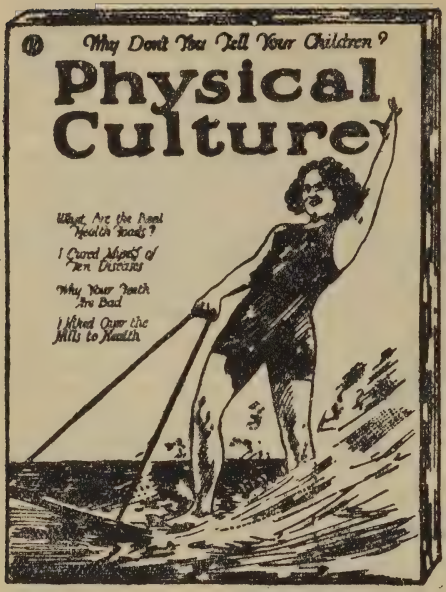
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